

# Syria in Transition, A.D. 550–750: An Archaeological Approach

CLIVE FOSS

## INTRODUCTION

In late antiquity, Syria was a rich and important province of a great empire, as it had been for centuries. It contained many flourishing cities set in a densely populated countryside whose inhabitants built churches and houses of elegantly carved stone. In the sixth century the country suffered an unparalleled series of disasters in the form of earthquakes, plague, and foreign invasion. Early in the seventh it passed under the control of the Persians, who had barely left when the victorious armies of Islam definitively removed it from the orbit of Constantinople and Christianity. This was not the end, but the beginning of another glorious epoch in which Syria became the center of a vast empire and was again famed for its great cities and monuments.

The cities and monuments of that period had little in common with their Roman forebears. In place of grandiose public works—theaters, stadia, gymnasia, agoras, and colonnaded streets—the “Islamic city” offered the mosque and the bazaar. The change reflected the deep differences in the social, economic, and above all religious structure of the Roman and Umayyad states. The *polis*, in the words of a well-known essay on this subject, had yielded to the *medina*.<sup>1</sup>

This study is intended to address these differences and the process of transformation. It examines city and country alike in two widely separated regions of Syria: the Orontes Valley with two of the greatest cities, Antioch and Apamea, and the country around them, and one lesser city, Epiphania; and the Hauran with its metropolis, Bostra. These regions have been chosen partly because they are very different from each other: the north with its hills and valleys is a transitional region between the Mediterranean and the interior, while the south is largely steppe bordering on the desert.

The main reason for selecting these regions, however, lies in the kind of information they can provide about the crucial period of transformation. Conventional written

A List of Abbreviations is found at the end of this article.

<sup>1</sup>See H. Kennedy, “From Polis to Madina: Urban Change in Late Antique and Early Islamic Syria,” *Past and Present* 106 (1985), 3–27, for the urban changes; and idem, “The Last Century of Byzantine Syria: A Reinterpretation,” *ByzF* 10 (1985), 141–84. The latter makes extensive use of the archaeological evidence, basically of cities, over a much wider region than that covered in this study. It will soon be apparent that the interpretation offered here is very different from Kennedy’s.

sources reveal surprisingly little about these two hundred years and are especially poor on the seventh century. The major texts—Theophanes and Nicephorus in Greek, Baladhuri and Tabari in Arabic, and the Syriac chronicles—were mostly written long after the age of the conquests, and their accounts, however circumstantial they appear, are full of contradictions and problems. In any case, they have little to say about conditions in city or country in Syria at any time in this age. From them, it would not be possible to reconstruct an image of the country in these centuries.

It is therefore necessary to turn to another kind of source, one that remains to be fully exploited: the material record. Syria is filled with imposing remains of late antique and early Islamic monuments, both urban and rural. Such material can be of enormous value for understanding the questions to be approached here, if examined in detail and brought together to support conclusions. In particular, the areas to be studied have a rich archaeological record including one city excavated extensively and two others at least partially, and a huge number of villages surveyed.

This study, therefore, examines these northern and southern districts with two questions in view: What did the Arabs find when they arrived to conquer this land, and how did they transform it during the first century of their rule? The present survey discusses these regions during the two hundred years of transition, examining the archaeological record (without neglecting the historical, however exiguous it might be) and integrating the results in the hope of obtaining a view of the country under Justinian, at the time of the conquests, and under the Umayyads. The survey ends with the fall of the Umayyads and the transfer of the capital of the Islamic state outside Syria.<sup>2</sup> It begins in the north, with Antioch.

#### ANTIOCH

Antioch, the greatest city of the Roman East, seat of a patriarch and of a governor who ruled a vast and strategic area, suffered an unparalleled series of calamities in the sixth century. A devastating fire in 525 was followed the next year by a severe earthquake.<sup>3</sup> The quake of 528, which virtually demolished the city, was even worse. Recovery had barely begun when the city was captured—for the first time in three hundred years—by the Persians, who burned it to the ground and deported its population in 540. These disasters were followed by the bubonic plague in 542, another earthquake in 551, a cattle plague in 553, another earthquake in 557, a recurrence of the bubonic plague in 560, the Persians in 573 who burned the suburbs, and still more earthquakes in 577 and 588 (the latter especially damaging). A drought killed the olive trees of the region in 599; the next year an infestation of weevils ruined the crops.

Accounts of some of these disasters are so detailed that the condition of the city in the sixth century can be imagined, if not exactly described. The quake of 526 and the

<sup>2</sup>This work was begun and sporadically continued during stays at Dumbarton Oaks, where it was greatly facilitated by that institution's Byzantine librarian, Irene Vaslef. Most of the project was executed during a very productive stay at the Institute for Advanced Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem. My sincere thanks to the director and secretary of the Institute, to Y. Tsafrir, who organized the group in which I participated, and to Richard Harper, who kindly put the facilities of the British School of Archaeology at my disposition.

<sup>3</sup>For this and what follows, see G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria* (Princeton, 1961), 520–71 *passim*.



fire that followed it are said to have destroyed the whole city, including all the major churches.<sup>4</sup> It caused enormous loss of life since it struck at dinnertime on a day when the city was crowded with visitors for the feast of the Ascension. The damage was so severe that the government contributed 3,000 pounds of gold for reconstruction, with an extra 1,000 for rebuilding the churches. The work had no sooner begun than the second quake struck in 528 (evidently there was something left to destroy). This provoked the citizens to change the name of the city to the more auspicious Theopolis, the "City of God," to avert further manifestations of divine wrath. Reconstruction continued for a decade until the next disaster.

In the spring of 540, the Persian king Chosroes I crossed the Roman frontier. After sacking Sura and holding Hierapolis to ransom, he burned the city of Berrhoea (Aleppo), though allowing the defenders of its acropolis to surrender. Most of them deserted to him because they had not been paid. In June, as the Persian army approached Antioch, many fled with their money. Chosroes demanded 1,000 pounds of gold but only got insults from the citizens, unwisely confident in the strength of the walls and the newly reinforced garrison. As the attack began, many people were crushed in the rush to escape. The Persians then broke through the walls, enslaved the survivors, looted the city, and burned it to the ground, with the exception of the cathedral. They also burned the suburbs. Having made his point, Chosroes withdrew. He visited Seleucia and Apamea and held Chalcis and Edessa to ransom before finally leaving Roman territory.<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt that the damage on this occasion was enormous and that the previous work of reconstruction was wiped out. Yet the fact that there was much left to burn shows that the previous accounts were exaggerated, however serious the earthquakes might have been. Once again the imperial government came to the rescue. Justinian took a special interest in restoring Antioch which, according to the contemporary, though not eyewitness, historian Procopius, was so devastated that the whole street system had disappeared and people could no longer locate their own property. The government brought in artisans and workers, carted off debris, piled large stones over destroyed sites, and laid out new colonnaded streets, markets, blocks of houses, water channels, fountains, and sewers. Baths were built, along with a grand new church of the Virgin, a poor-house, a hospice, and an inn. Justinian also rebuilt the walls, strengthening and reducing their circuit to exclude the island in the Orontes, formerly a palatial district.<sup>6</sup> For the moment, Antioch rose from its ruins, only to succumb to further troubles. Despite the work of Justinian, there can be no doubt that the city was devastated and left with a much reduced population by the end of the sixth century.

Nevertheless, Antioch survived, though necessarily much diminished from its former magnificence. It was captured by the Persians in 610 and remained under their control for twenty years. Nothing is known of this period, nor of the brief Byzantine reconquest, which was soon followed by the advance of the Arabs, who took the city in 638 and ruled it for the next three hundred years.

For the Arabs, Antioch was an important frontier fort and base for further expansion. After 646, when the governor Muawiya destroyed the Byzantine forts between Antioch

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 521–26.

<sup>5</sup>Procopius, *Wars* 2.5–12; see 2.8–10 for Antioch. See also the discussion of Downey, *Antioch*, 533–45.

<sup>6</sup>Procopius, *Buildings* 2.5, discussed by Downey, *Antioch*, 544–53.

and Masisa (Mopsuestia in Cilicia) to create a kind of no-man's land between the two antagonistic powers, the city became the advance post for Islam. The caliph Othman (644–658) had a permanent force stationed there, supported by lands assigned to it. The garrison was reinforced in 663 by Muawiya, then caliph, who brought in Persian troops from Baalbek and Homs. Detachments from Antioch were posted to outlying bases such as Cyrrhus, though later, as the frontier advanced, part of the Antioch army was permanently transferred there.<sup>7</sup>

Antioch at first was included in the *jund*, or military district, of Homs (Emesa); Muawiya or his son Yazid (680–683) separated off the northern cities, including Antioch, to form the new *jund* of Qinnasrin (Chalcis). As the Arabs made further conquests, the province of Qinnasrin was subdivided, with the frontier bases, including Antioch, made into the new district of al-Awasim by Harun al-Rashid (786–809). According to some accounts, Antioch succeeded Mambij as the capital of this district.<sup>8</sup> During this time the city is mentioned merely in its administrative role, which is reflected in the presence of a mint for copper coinage in the early eighth century.<sup>9</sup> These coins, however, form only a single issue and are extremely rare, especially when compared with those of Qinnasrin and Aleppo, the major mints of the district. They suggest that the economic importance of the city was limited.

The seventh and eighth centuries, here as elsewhere, are extremely obscure. Actual descriptions of the city date only from the tenth century and later, when it was noted as a place with long walls within which were fields and mills; that is, the walls of Justinian now included much unoccupied space. The city had substantial churches, including the round church of St. Mary, built by Justinian, still richly decorated with gold, silver, and mosaics. The caliph al-Walid carried off several of its columns to adorn his great mosque in Damascus.<sup>10</sup> The survival of the churches indicates a certain vitality of the city and its Christian community, which had endured through so many catastrophes and changes of regime. These sketchy sources alone would suggest that Umayyad Antioch preserved the appearance of a city, though much reduced from its earlier glory, and that its position on or near the frontier assured its continuing importance, not, as before, as a great metropolis and center of trade and production, but as a bulwark of the frontier and a base for campaigns against Byzantium.

Antioch was an extremely large Roman city with a center covering about 5 km<sup>2</sup> (Fig. A). This area contained the palace, amphitheater, theater, hippodrome, several large baths, and lavish private villas. Unfortunately, little has been uncovered, as the site is

<sup>7</sup>Al-Baladhuri, *The Origins of the Islamic State*, ed. and trans. P. K. Hitti (New York, 1916), 180 (troops transferred), 226 f (Othman), 230 (Cyrrhus).

<sup>8</sup>The sources, which are not at all consistent, are analyzed in G. Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems* (London, 1890), 35–38.

<sup>9</sup>See the valuable survey of Shraga Qedar, "Copper Coinage of Syria in the Seventh and Eighth Century AD," *Israel Numismatic Journal* 10 (1988–89), 27–39, with the table, p. 37. The coins in question are of the aniconic series J, dated by Qedar to 710–800, but see S. Album, "Umayyad and Abbasid Relationship Is Rethought," *The Celator* 3.6 (1989), i, xxii–xxv, and *ibid.*, 3.7 (1989), i, xxiii, xxv, who dates them more closely (3.6, xxii) to the 90s A.H. (709–719).

<sup>10</sup>See the 10th-century accounts of Mas'udi, ibn Hawkal, Istakhri, and Ibn al-Fakih, cited in Le Strange, *Palestine*, 367–70. For the general question of continuity over a long period, see H. Kennedy, "Antioch: From Byzantium to Islam and Back Again," in *The City in Late Antiquity*, ed. H. Rich (London, 1992), 181–98.

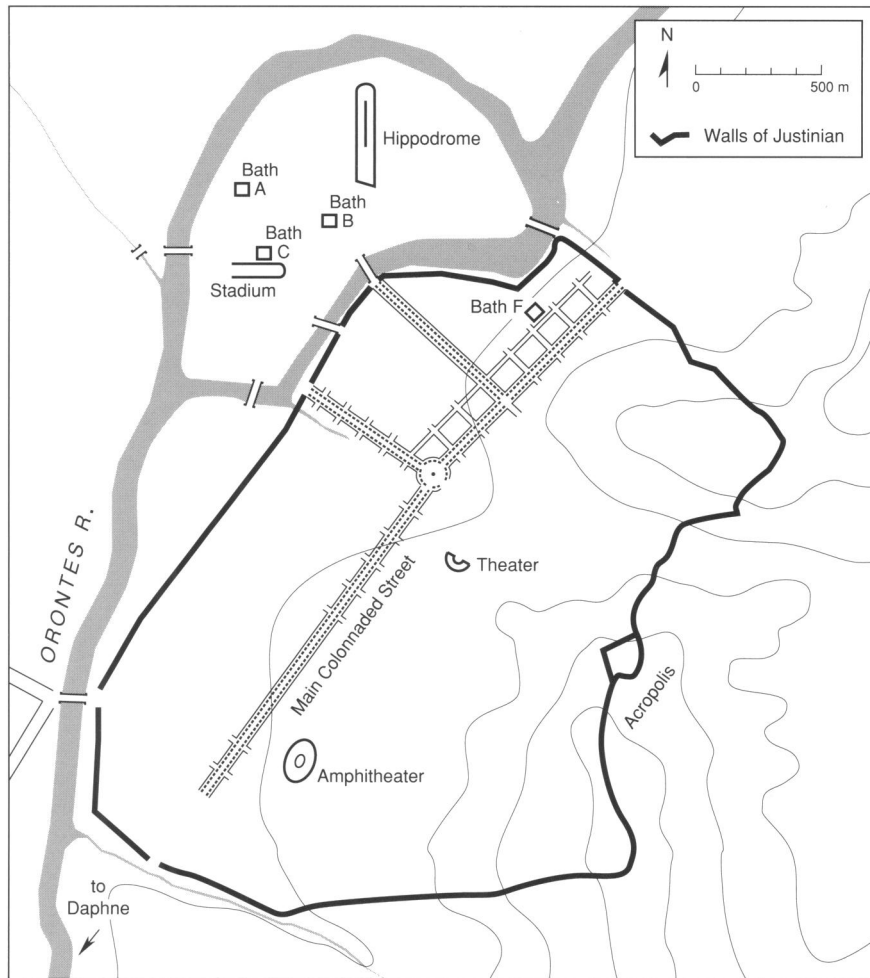


Fig. A Antioch

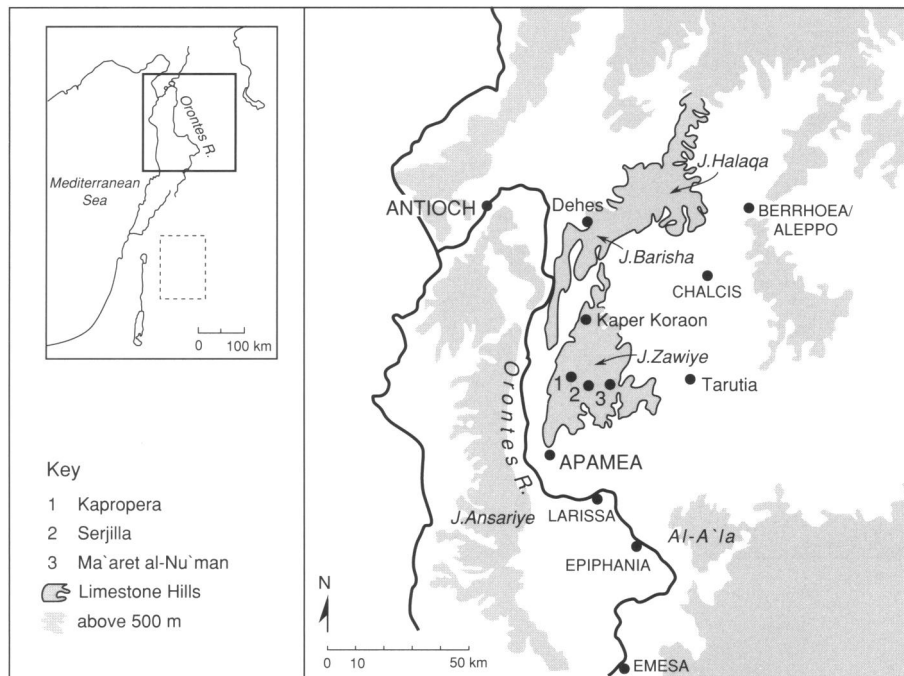


Fig. B Sites of northern Syria

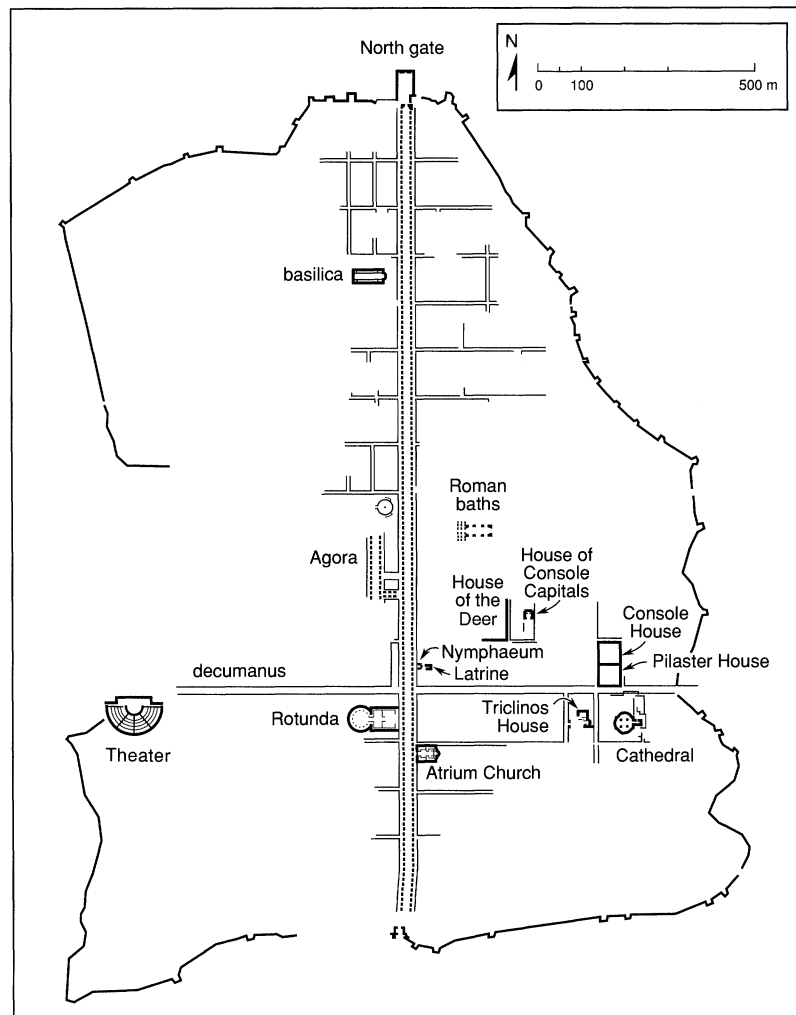


Fig. C Apamea

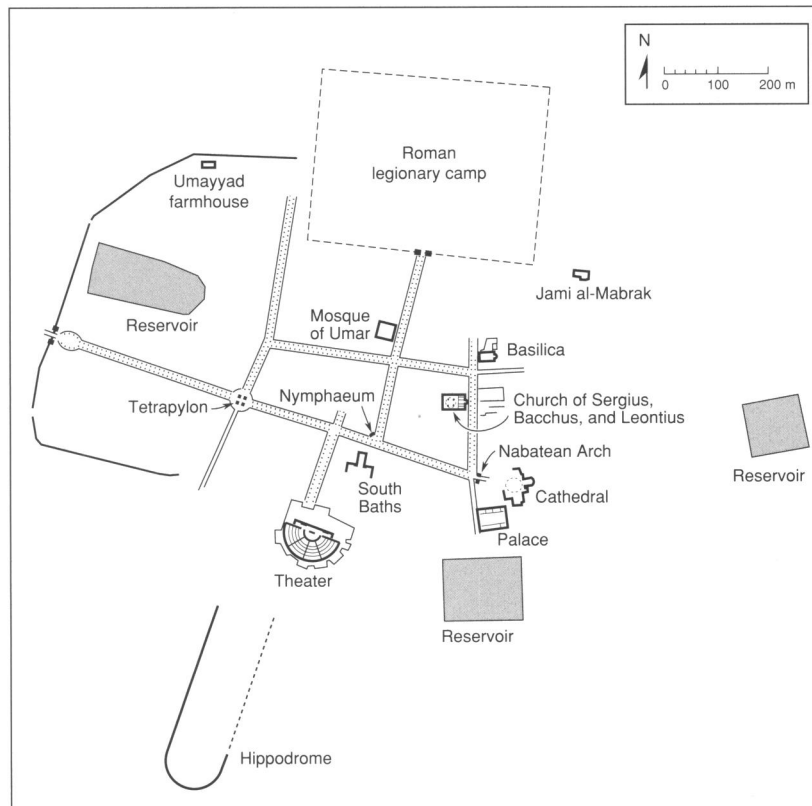


Fig. D Bostra

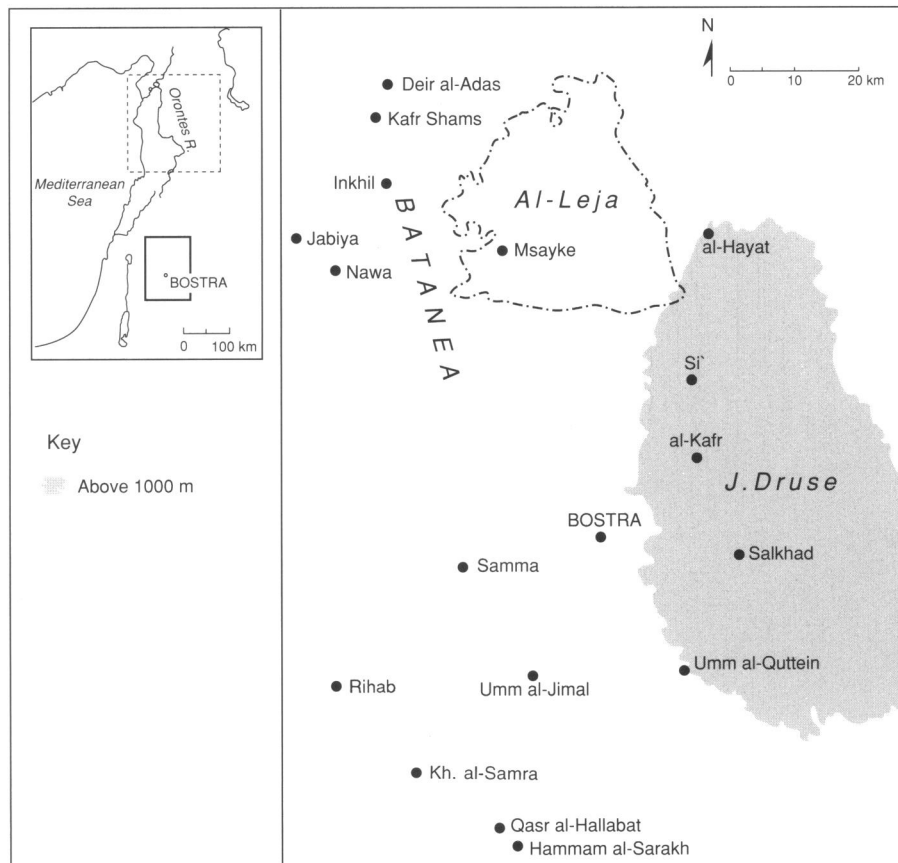


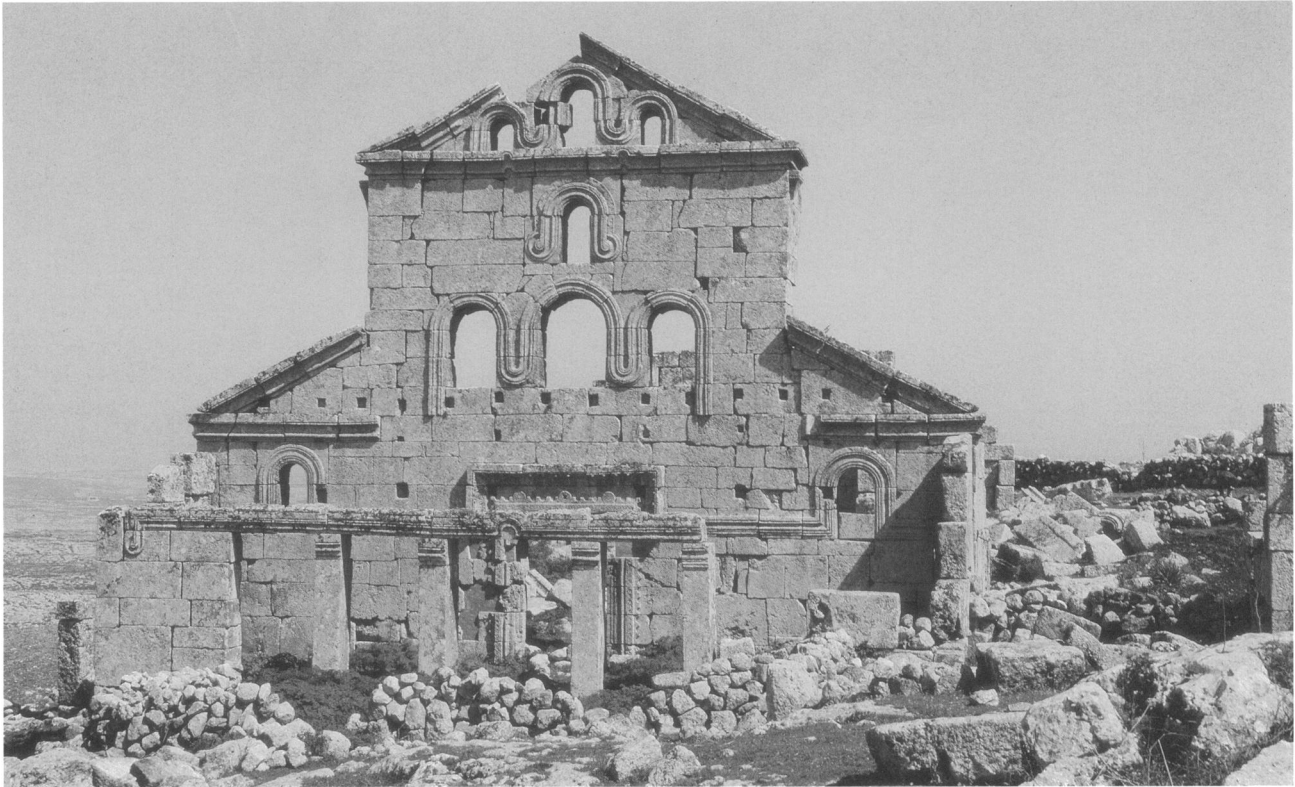
Fig. E Sites of the Hauran



1 Territory of Antioch, the village of Qirqbize



2 Territory of Antioch, ruins of Baqirha

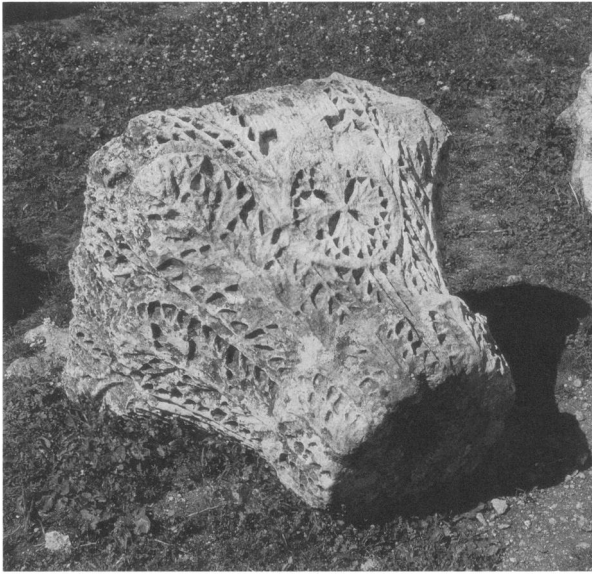


3 Baqirha, east church (546)



4 Dar Qita, church of St. Sergius, entrance gate (537)





5 Dar Qita, church of St. Sergius, capital



6 Dar Qita, tower (551)

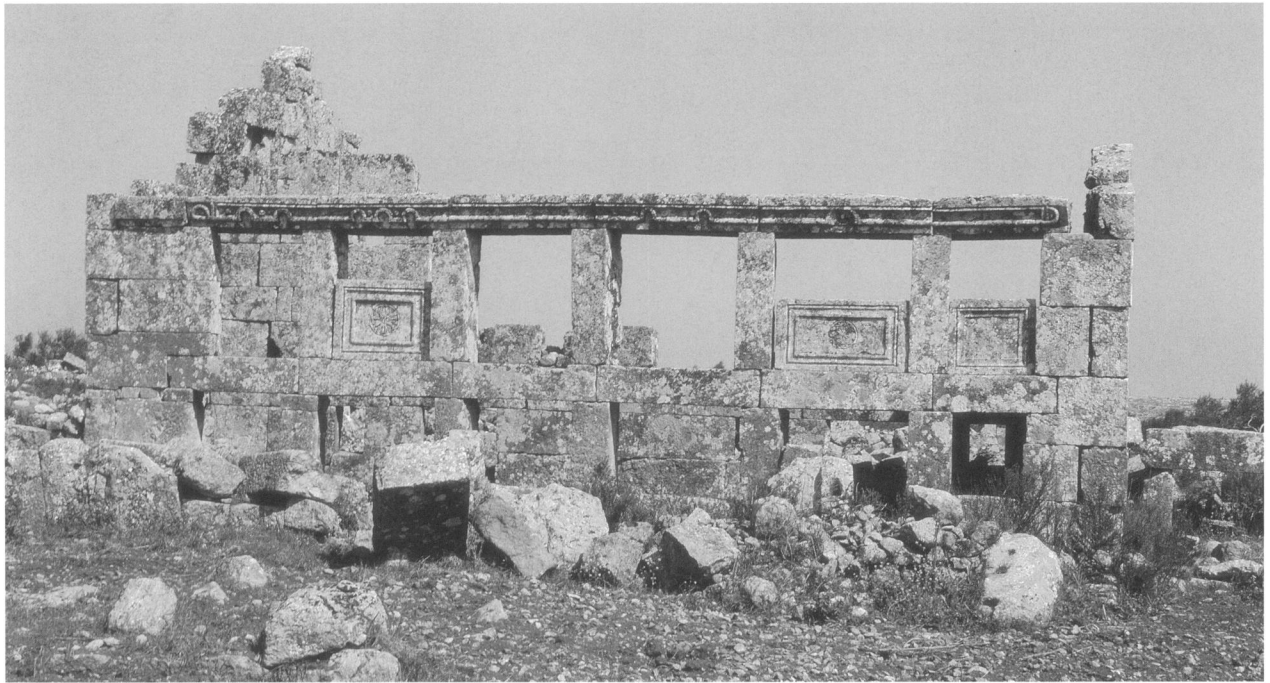




7 Bamukka, olive press



8 Dehes, entrance gate and courtyard of house



9 Dehes, house with upper veranda



10 Apamea, colonnaded street with votive column



11 Apamea, wall of colonnaded street with painted inscription



12 Apamea, blocking of main colonnade





13 Apamea, main colonnade, structures built onto pavement



14 Apamea, *decumanus*, structure built into street (*right foreground*), blocked colonnades behind



15 Apamea, Atrium Church, main apse in foreground



16 Apamea, Atrium Church, buttress built over street



17 Apamea, Cathedral, entrance from *decumanus* (529)



18 Apamea, Cathedral, *opus sectile* floor behind apse





19 Apamea, Triclinos House, blocking of colonnade



20 Apamea, Triclinos House, brick oven



21 Apamea, Console House, atrium





22 Apamea, Console House, apse inserted into colonnade



23 Apamea, Console House, late blocking (*left*)



24 Bostra, remains of main colonnaded street



25 Bostra, Nabatean arch



26 Bostra, south baths



27 Bostra, church of Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius, main apse

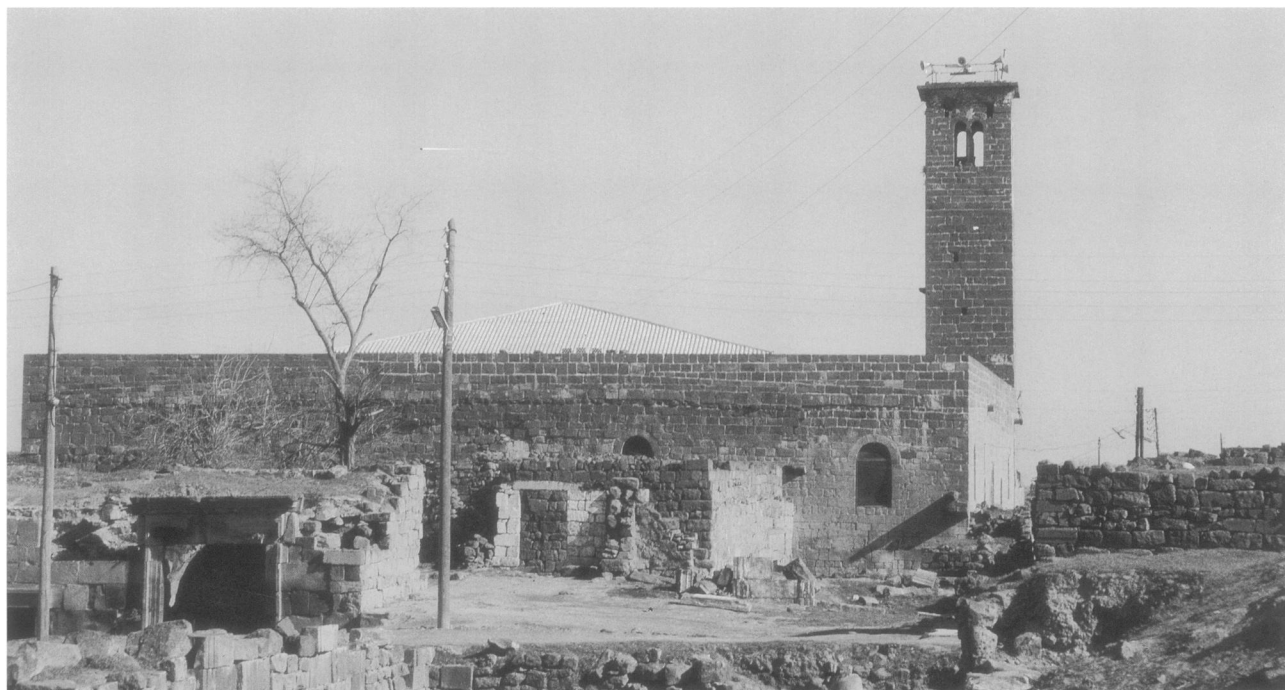




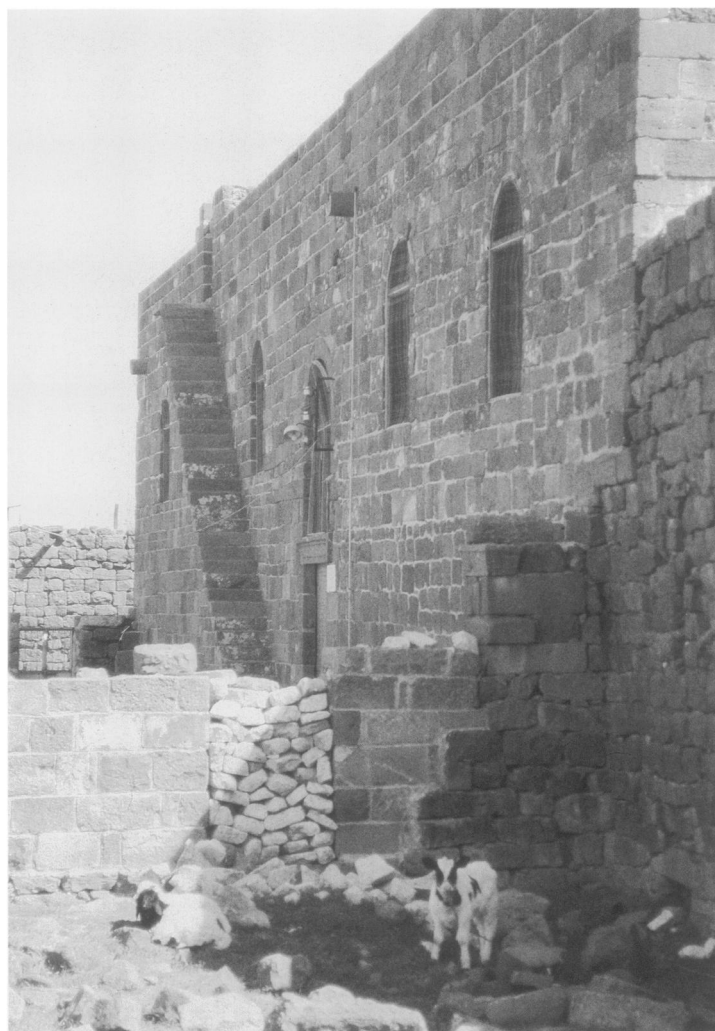
28 Bostra, palace east of the church of Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius



29 Bostra, basilica



30 Bostra, mosque of Umar



31 Bostra, mosque of Umar, external stairway



32 Bostra, Jami al-Mabrak

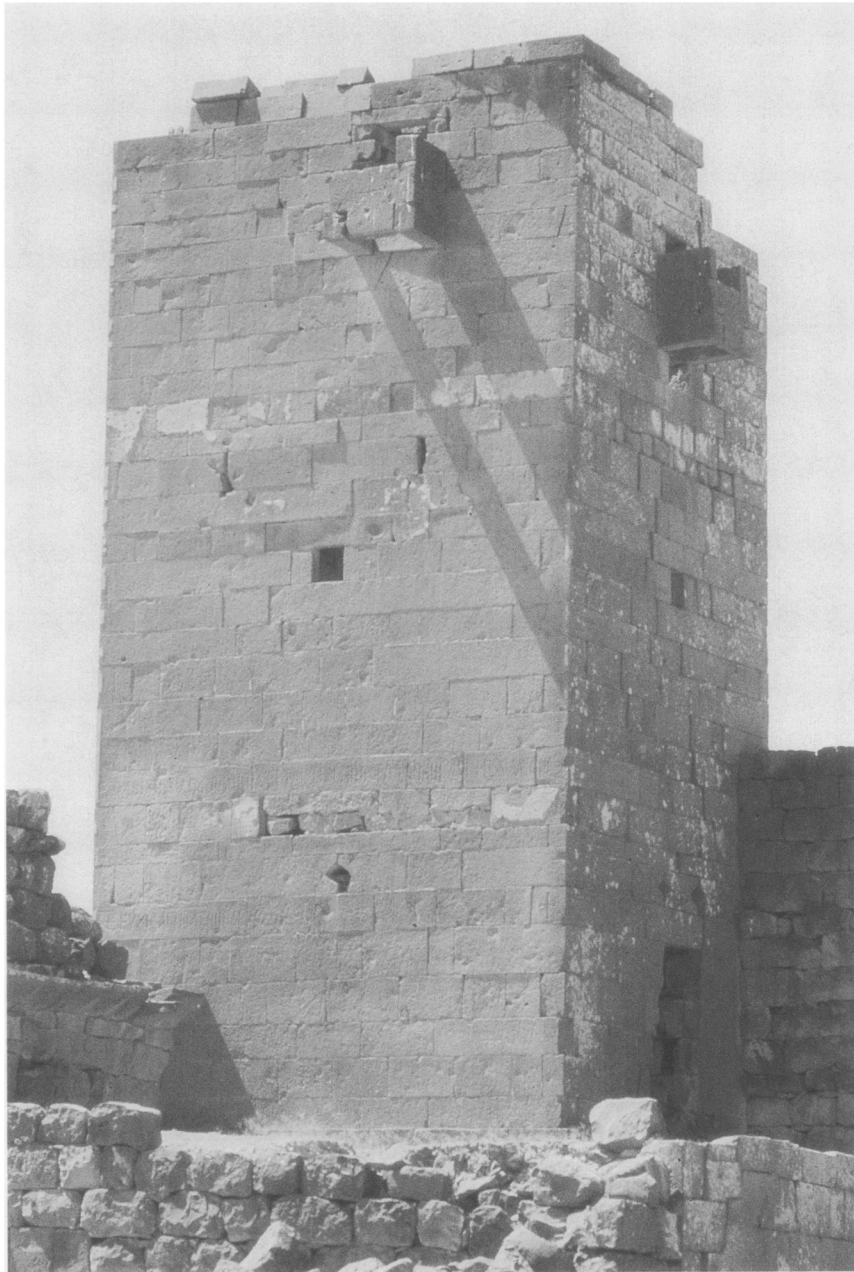


33 Bostra, Jami al-Mabrak, earliest rooms



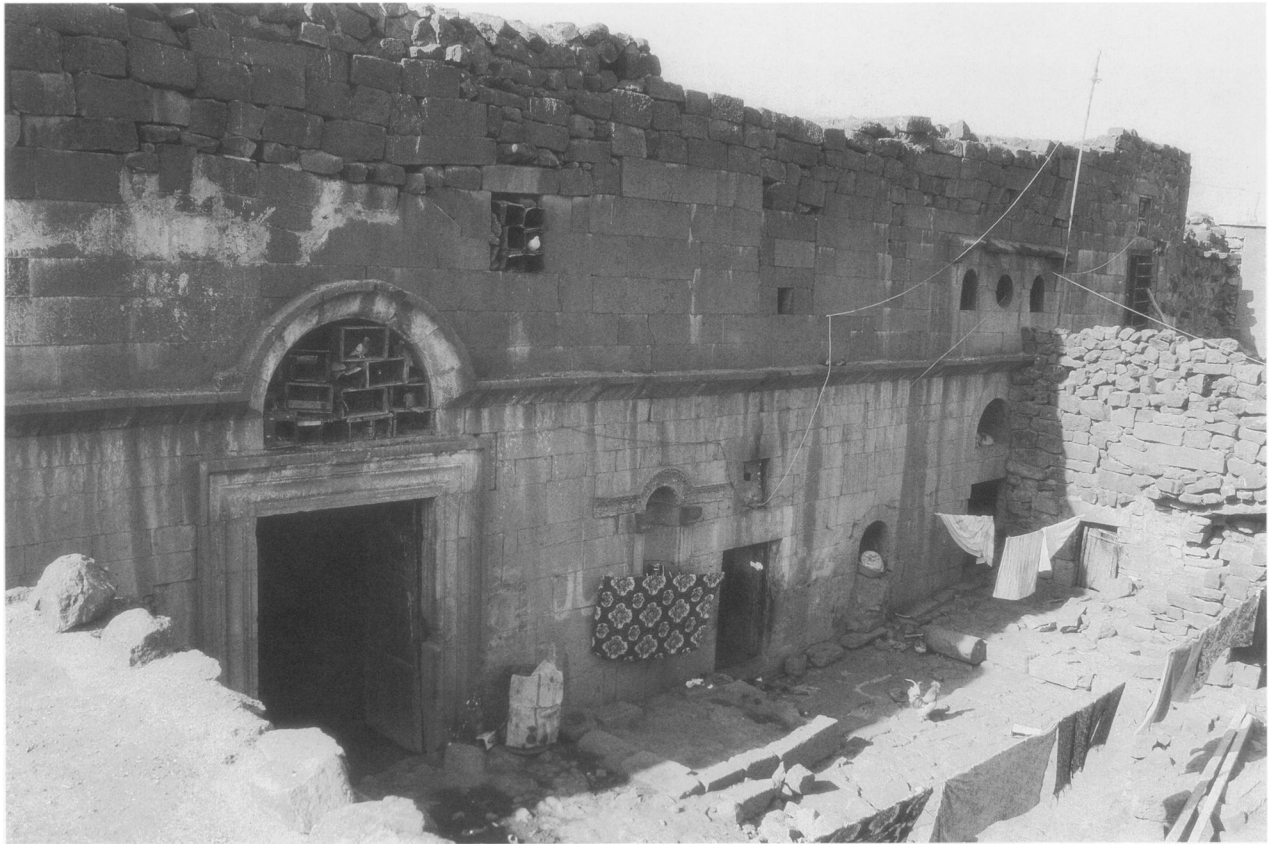
34 Bostra, Jami al-Mabrak, *mihrab*





35 Umm al-Jimal, tower of barracks





36 Inkhil, palatial building



37 Inkhil, palatial building, niche



38 Deir al-Adas, mosaic of camel caravan (722)

buried in several meters of silt. The excavations did, however, reveal numerous luxurious villas with mosaic pavements, some of the street system, and a few public buildings, most of them outside the walls of Justinian. They provide enough material to enable a dim outline of development to be perceived. Most of it, as would be expected from the history, reveals massive destruction followed by partial rebuilding and some continuity, often on a vastly changed scale, under the Arabs.

The excavations of the main colonnaded street not only reveal the enormous destruction by earthquakes and Persians and the vast work of reconstruction of Justinian, but also provide visible confirmation for the account of Procopius. They show that work began after the earthquakes of 526 and 528, when the colonnades and adjacent shops were restored and a temporary paving laid at a slightly higher level. Much more massive was the work carried out after 540. In this project the old pavement was taken up, and the street was covered with debris that formed the base for a new paving of fine basalt blocks. The new street was somewhat narrower than the old, but had sidewalks with a new drainage system below. These abutted the new colonnade behind which a pavement of *opus sectile* covered the old mosaics. With sidewalk and colonnades, the street was more than 26 m wide; the reconstruction was on a monumental scale. In another spot, a circular plaza was restored with a new paving. In all this, such a great effort was made to retain the ancient magnificence of the city that the laudatory tone of Procopius' description seems well justified.<sup>11</sup>

Other excavations within the Justinianic walls provide scattered but suggestive evidence. A large bath (bath F), of the lavish kind that adorned Roman cities, stood near the wall below the slopes of the acropolis. It bears a mosaic with an inscription that calls it the *dēmosion* and shows that it was restored from the foundations in 538, at which time a pavement of *opus sectile* was also added. The rebuilding was on a smaller scale than the original; some parts were left in ruins. The restoration had hardly been finished when the whole building was destroyed by fire, probably in 540, and abandoned.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, a large house with exedra and portico near the west wall was damaged, then poorly restored, then finally destroyed by fire, a sequence also reflecting the events of 528 and 540.<sup>13</sup> Finally, another house on the slopes of the acropolis hill shows the same development.<sup>14</sup>

The area left outside the new walls had a different fate. Excavations here concentrated on the island in the Orontes, site of the palace of Valens, the hippodrome, and broad colonnaded streets. The hippodrome was abandoned and its stones used for building the new wall. The lavish bath C was ruined in the earthquakes and never restored, as was the adjacent stadium to which it may have been connected. The smaller bath A was also ruined, but its peristyle court at least was restored in the late sixth century.<sup>15</sup>

Antioch's most famous suburb was Daphne, set in a grove with abundant springs, site of the temple of Apollo and later of a church of the Archangel Michael, and of numerous

<sup>11</sup> See *Antioch*, V, esp. 148–51 (general summary), 21–29, 94 f, 99, and *Antioch*, I, 93–100.

<sup>12</sup> *Antioch*, III, 8 f.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 f.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–11.

<sup>15</sup> Hippodrome: J. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses* (London, 1986), 456; bath C and stadium: *Antioch*, I, 19–33; bath A: *ibid.*, 4–7.

villas. Chosroes visited the site in 540, sacrificed to the Nymphs, and destroyed only the church. Justinian had it rebuilt, but the earthquake of 577 is said to have ruined the entire place.<sup>16</sup> The excavations offer only scattered evidence. Numerous coins from the local theater indicate activity continuing until the reign of Tiberius II (578–582), as do those from a large building of uncertain purpose, where the final destruction took place after 583. One large, complex villa was apparently restored after the earthquakes and occupied until the early seventh century, whereas the great villa at Yakto, famous for its mosaics portraying the life of the city, was apparently never reoccupied after the earthquakes.<sup>17</sup> This all suggests considerable damage in the early sixth century, as at Antioch, with some activity continuing after the earthquake of 577 (when some buildings must have been restored), but tapering off by the end of the century. The site appears to have been abandoned thereafter.

Evidence for the succeeding age is even less satisfactory, largely because the remains were not dated with any accuracy. They show, however, that Antioch had fundamentally changed. None of the great churches was discovered, but the later descriptions show that several of them continued to stand despite all the disasters and that they, along with the walls, formed the main adornment of Umayyad Antakiyah.

The excavations along the main street reveal a fundamental change. New structures, all of undetermined purpose but sometimes very solidly built, were inserted directly on the pavement and over the colonnades. Wells were dug to provide a water supply in an age when the aqueducts were no longer functioning. This activity seems to be Umayyad, Abbasid, and later.<sup>18</sup> It appears that the inhabitants of this time built their houses (if that is what the structures represent) in convenient open spaces. These were far easier to occupy than the former residences and public buildings, many of them converted to heaps of rubble that the authorities no longer had the resources to clear.<sup>19</sup>

The evidence from other parts of the city is similar. The three sites within the walls were already abandoned in the sixth century, but those on the island show signs of later activity. The former hippodrome was filled with houses with stone walls, and apparently long occupied. Gravestones from the site are of the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>20</sup> The Roman bath B and a large house stood side by side just south of the hippodrome. The house was divided into smaller rooms, and many of its openings were blocked. The new rooms extended out into the lane that had provided the entrance to the bath and were built against the facades of both; these levels are described as Byzantine and “early Cufic,” that is, probably Umayyad. They represent occupation on a new and smaller scale after the destructions of the sixth century, and show no substantial change during the follow-

<sup>16</sup>Procopius, *Wars* 2.11.6–13; idem, *Buildings* 2.9.29; Evagrius 5.17.

<sup>17</sup>*Antioch*, II, 57–94 (theater); I, 107–13 (large building), 95–147 (Yakto); III, 25–31 (villa).

<sup>18</sup>*Antioch*, V, 99–118, 148–51. Little evidence for dating these structures was reported, but some of them at least appear to be earlier than the 10th century. In one place, the pottery sequence was continuous through the 7th century (*Antioch*, IV.1, 157 f); inscriptions (uninformative) found in the street dig are of the 9th–11th centuries: *Antioch*, II, 166–69. Many of the medieval remains discovered in these excavations belong to the Byzantine reconquest and are therefore omitted here.

<sup>19</sup>I do not see any evidence from the reports that these buildings reflect the transformation of the street into a medieval *sug*; they seem rather to represent a much simpler phenomenon. The structures associated with the narrowing of the street into small passages are of the 11th century: *Antioch*, V, 21–29.

<sup>20</sup>Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 456; *Antioch*, I, 34–41.

ing age.<sup>21</sup> The former grand bath C, ruined in the earthquakes, became a quarry, with limekilns installed in its ruins; later, crude rubble walls were inserted.<sup>22</sup> An area immediately to the south, with numerous small rooms, water pipes, and cisterns, saw considerable rebuilding, always on a small scale. Pottery of the sixth and later centuries indicates continuity of occupation through the transition from Roman to Arab rule.<sup>23</sup> The large bath A, near the Orontes, came to be filled with debris and rubble walls.<sup>24</sup>

This material, though fragmentary, suggests that life in the city continued long beyond the Arab conquest, but on a relatively small scale. The great public buildings of antiquity no longer functioned. They either lay in ruins from the various earthquakes and fires or were transformed, with small dwellings occupying their interiors. Likewise, the wide boulevards were occupied by humble buildings. The city of the Umayyads and their successors seems to have been a place with little of its ancient urban character, but rather a vast field of ruins with occupation on a small scale, often in ancient buildings or streets. The surviving churches would have towered over such a settlement, dwarfed already by its massive walls. If the area of settlement on the island was continuous with that of the center, the city still occupied a considerable extent, but the island could equally well represent a separate, rural community outside the walls. Later sources mention gardens and open space within the walls, a situation that probably prevailed already by the mid-seventh century.

The archaeological evidence is scattered and specific to a few parts of the site. For a more general view of the period, the coins and pottery found in the excavations offer a valuable supplement, especially useful for understanding economic developments, both in the city and in relation to other regions.

Coins found in the excavations clearly reflect continuing activity, though nothing more specific, as they were published without findspots. As might be expected, there are large numbers from Justinian, then a continuing sequence through the reign of Focas, after which the city fell to the Persians.<sup>25</sup> Although the Sasanians are only directly represented by two coins of Chosroes II, the 52 bronze coins of Heraclius presumably represent activity during their occupation of the city as well as during the short period of Byzantine reconquest. The number increases after the Arab conquest: the 70 coins of Constans II (641–668) represent the money used in the region before the Arabs began to strike their own types, as do the 18 imitations of that series.<sup>26</sup> Most of the coins of Constans are of a short period, 645–648, evidently a time of some special activity. The 23 so-called Arab-Byzantine coins represent continuity until the last decade of the seventh century.

<sup>21</sup>*Antioch*, I, 8–18.

<sup>22</sup>*Antioch*, I, 19–31; evidence for dating the “Arab” remains (perhaps coins) was not given.

<sup>23</sup>*Antioch*, I, 1–3. The report mentions “Cufic” sherds, which apparently means material of the 9th century or later.

<sup>24</sup>*Antioch*, I, 4–7; the late walls, called “Cufic or later,” are given the date of ca. 1000.

<sup>25</sup>The Byzantine coins are tabulated in *Antioch*, IV.1, 148–68. The totals given here for those of Heraclius and Constans II differ from the published figures because it has been possible to correct a few attributions. My sincere thanks to Brooks Levy, curator of the numismatic collection at Princeton, for allowing me to examine these coins.

<sup>26</sup>There is much controversy about the dating of the imitation Byzantine and the “Arab-Byzantine” coins. For a recent reasonable summary, see Qedar, “Copper Coinage.”

A great increase comes under the later Umayyads: the reigns of Abd al-Malik (685–705) through Hisham (723–745) are represented by 178 coins, to which the 330 undated aniconic types may be added. These reflect the growing importance of Antioch, especially as a military base. They also show its connections with the region: the mints most frequently represented (in descending order) are Damascus, Aleppo, Qinnasrin, and Homs; none of the rare coins struck in Antioch itself were discovered.

Even more impressive are the 1,067 Abbasid coins, which attest the growing role of the city after the establishment of the Awasim and show activity that continued into the tenth century. Of those that can be specifically identified, the largest numbers come from the reigns of al-Mansur (754–775; 70 coins) and al-Mahdi (775–785; 134 coins). These reveal a change of orientation: most of the coins of al-Mansur were struck in Syrian mints (Aleppo, 49; Qinnasrin, 12), but all the legible pieces of al-Mahdi come from Iraq (Kufa, 55; Baghdad, 25). By the late eighth century the whole focus of the empire had moved to Iraq, and Syria was becoming a more peripheral region.<sup>27</sup>

The pottery from the excavations also provides valuable information about economic conditions.<sup>27a</sup> Vast quantities were uncovered all over the site but rarely in stratified contexts, as the levels investigated were highly disturbed. Nevertheless, the general picture, like that of the coins from which it differs considerably, is of real interest. North African Red Slip ware begins to reappear in the reign of Justinian, reflecting the reconquest of the western Mediterranean and renewed contacts between it and Syria. More common, though, is the contemporary Phocaean Red Slip ware, imported from western Asia Minor along the route that eventually led to Constantinople.

Both of these types yield to pottery that imitates the North African, apparently made locally when the imported ware was no longer available. It appears to date to the mid-seventh century, reflecting a break in contact with the Byzantine Empire that may be associated with the Arab conquest. This pottery is of a lower quality but still maintains classical forms. It thus shows a real continuity of material culture on a basic level through the period of transition. On the other hand, its relative rarity may suggest declining resources and population. These wares are often associated with painted Coptic pottery from Egypt, reflecting a changed pattern of trade, a time of contact with the Islamic world rather than with the Byzantine Mediterranean. On the whole, though, these late wares, along with the glazed pottery that begins to appear in the eighth century, are far less common than the earlier, confirming the picture from the sources and the remains of a smaller and evidently poorer community.

This picture is consistent but does not agree with the numismatic evidence, which implies increasing activity. As the documentation is sparse, only a tentative explanation may be offered. It is possible that the pottery and remains reflect the state of the civil population, while the coins represent military activity, being used to pay the troops or in markets set up to supply them. There may have been large armies in the city without a correspondingly substantial civil population. Lacking adequate publication of the differ-

<sup>27</sup> See the lists in *Antioch*, IV.1, 109–22; they include a vast number of imitation and cast coins, which presumably represent the coinage of Syria in the 9th century, when few regular bronze coins were struck; see the discussion of George Miles, *ibid.*, 117 f.

<sup>27a</sup> *Antioch*, IV.1, 56–59.

ent classes of evidence, however, it is impossible to correlate them with any degree of certainty.

In any case, all the physical evidence shows an enormous change in the life of the city between the sixth and eighth century. Recorded disasters, most of them natural, are sufficient to explain the disappearance of the great ancient metropolis. Although the Persians played a role in its decline, there is no evidence that the Arab conquest was a factor. The Arabs appear rather to have found a city already largely ruined and to have maintained it on a relatively small scale. The Umayyad city consisted of small buildings standing amid the ruins and occasional great churches of the earlier age. Arab Antakiyah maintained some importance as a military base but never regained the appearance of a great city. The evidence is scattered and limited, especially for this period, but adequate to show a general development. More specific and clear data come from the territory of Antioch, where carefully studied standing remains enable the development of the entire region to be envisioned.

### *The Territory of Antioch*

Being a great metropolis, Antioch had a huge territory that stretched 100 km into the interior and a similar distance north and south.<sup>28</sup> Although most of it consisted of mountains and hills, it did include one broad and fertile plain northeast of the city around a large marshy lake.<sup>29</sup>

This was the best agricultural land, but it provides little evidence for the periods in question because it has been continuously occupied. The plain is covered with mounds, the sites of prehistoric and later settlement, many of which have been investigated. Late antiquity has left little trace here, probably because the landowners, who would have built houses of permanent materials, had their villas in the city, while the locals lived in houses of reeds and mud brick that have left no trace. The plain was more densely occupied in subsequent periods, but no conclusions about Umayyad or Abbasid settlement patterns may be drawn, because the surveyors included everything from the seventh through the eighteenth century in one category.<sup>30</sup>

One site, however, is suggestive. The mound of Chatal Hüyük contained an entire village of closely packed houses of mud brick, containing three to four rooms—some of them stables—with floors of packed earth, arranged on streets paved with small stones. A stone stairway led up from the plain, and the settlement was surrounded by a fortification wall. As no chronology was determined (the site is called merely “Byzantine/medieval Arab”), it can only be taken as a possible example of living conditions over a long period without enabling any development to be followed.<sup>31</sup>

The most spectacular and detailed evidence comes from the limestone hills east of Antioch, which form an almost unbroken series of ranges stretching some 120 km from

<sup>28</sup>See the discussion of G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du nord* (Paris, 1953–58), III, 12–14, with the map, p. 57.

<sup>29</sup>See R. J. Braidwood, *Mounds in the Plain of Antioch* (Chicago, 1937), 8–11, 38, for the general physical conditions.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, map XII, p. 45, and map XIII, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup>R. C. Haines, *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch*, II (Chicago, 1971), 10–13.

north to south. Because the phenomena they represent are common to the whole district, this large area, which was comprised in the territories of Antioch and Apamea, will be considered as a whole, though aspects peculiar to the territory of Apamea will be treated below.

Three main groups of hills comprise the system: the Jebel Siman/Halaqa in the north, about 50 km east of Antioch; the Jebel Barisha/A'la/Wastani, above the Orontes; and the Jebel Zawiye, which stretches south as far as Apamea (Fig. B). The main Roman and modern highway from Antioch to Berrhoea runs through a gap that, together with the adjacent fertile plain of Sermeda, separates the two northern ranges. Both of these, as well as the northern part of the Jebel Zawiye, were included in the territory of Antioch.

These rocky hills rarely rise more than 800 m above the surrounding plains. They are not high enough to provide refuges, like the neighboring mountains of the Amanus or the Lebanon, but nevertheless are difficult of access. Although the Roman highway passes between the ranges, no road leads into them. Only steep tracks, impassable by wheeled vehicles, connect them with the neighboring plains, and communication within them is by similar tracks. The Jebel Zawiye is more isolated, rising very steeply from the Orontes but sloping more gently toward the east.

This is all a marginal region, remote but not inaccessible from the neighboring centers of population, but short of all natural resources except stone. The limestone hills contain no source of water; all must be stored in cisterns from rainfall, and no irrigation is practicable. Although this is not an obvious first place to settle if land is available in the plains, the hills offer certain advantages. Their location provides relative security without inaccessibility, and their altitude makes them suitable for raising fruit and olive trees in the adequate local heavy, stony soil. The region also has enough small basins and open country for pasture and cultivation.

These hills contain the well-preserved remains of some seven hundred villages, all finely constructed of solid stone (Figs. 1–7).<sup>32</sup> The villages range in size from a few houses to more than a hundred. Most have churches; very few include public buildings of any kind. Thanks to detailed studies and surveys, the nature of the villages, with their historical and economic development, is well established. They may therefore be discussed in general, with specific treatment reserved for Dehes, which has been at least partially excavated.

Although these settlements are beautifully constructed of dressed stone, sometimes with elegant decoration, they are definitely all villages; characteristically urban structures are almost totally absent. The vast majority of the buildings, some 95 percent, are houses. They are clustered together, sometimes in a seemingly ordered fashion, as they were often built to face the sun, but without any regular planning. There are normally no

<sup>32</sup> For the villages and their houses, see G. Tate, *Les campagnes de la Syrie du nord* (Paris, 1992), 13–84. For the importance of this work, and a general summary of its contents, see my review, “The Near Eastern Countryside in Late Antiquity,” in *The Roman and Byzantine Near East: Some Recent Archaeological Research*, ed. J. Humphrey (Ann Arbor, 1995), 218–22. This region and its villages are placed in the broad context of the late antique Levant in the excellent study of P.-L. Gatier, “Villages du proche-orient protobyzantin,” in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East*, ed. G. King and A. Cameron (Princeton, 1994), 17–48; this work is filled with insights of value for the whole region studied here.



streets or open public spaces, no buildings that can be identified as offering public amenities, and, in the entire region, only five baths. Churches, on the other hand, are abundant; some villages have several.

The villages were largely self-contained and inward looking; blank walls face the outside, arranged for protection against marauders or wild animals, but without formal fortification. Life centered in the houses, which are normally two-story structures facing an enclosed courtyard. Although the number of rooms may vary from one to thirteen, most houses had three to four rooms, arranged side by side on the upper floor, with an open, usually colonnaded veranda overlooking the court. The rooms, which average about 5.5–6 m square, have been taken as the dwellings of an individual family unit. The ground floor was reserved for animals, which were watered or fed from the numerous stone mangers found there. Likewise, the court was used not for recreation or a garden, but for the animals. The houses had no running water, no latrines, and no special facilities for bathing. In fact, they are all highly unspecialized. It is impossible to tell from their appearance what activities were practiced in them or what occupation, beside agriculture, their owners followed. Many houses show signs of enlargement, presumably to accommodate added family members.

Each village was part of an agricultural landscape.<sup>33</sup> They stand in relatively close proximity to each other, separated by 3 to 5 km. Each village had its own distinct territory defined by boundary markers and walls of stones cleared from the fields. They range from less than 3 to more than 10 km<sup>2</sup>, with the smallest in the rugged hills of the north and the largest in the more open country of the Jebel Zawiye, which offered greater possibility for planting crops. In all cases the crops were the result of dry farming: this is an area of limited rainfall, where water was a valuable commodity, stored in cisterns. There is no evidence for irrigation, only troughs in the fields used for watering livestock.

The economy of these villages was mixed, with the raising of olive trees the predominant but not exclusive form of production. Vast numbers of olive presses stand in and around the villages. Some are located in the houses or in underground chambers, but the majority are on the outskirts (some villages are even surrounded by them), either in the open or in chambers with powerful presses. The latter required a work force of ten to twenty men. Their importance was overwhelming. In forty-five villages studied in detail, there were 245 presses (with more certainly buried or undiscovered); only six of these villages had none. Most of the presses appear to have belonged to private owners.<sup>34</sup> Fruit trees were also an important element of the agricultural economy, as were grapes, wheat, beans, and vegetables. In addition, each village kept livestock stabled on the ground floor of the houses, as shown by the vast numbers of mangers, and pastured in fields that can be distinguished from cropland by their shape as marked out by stone walls.

Much of this production was necessarily for self-sufficiency, but the olives, and quite probably the wool and meat from the animals, would have formed items of trade enabling the villagers to accumulate the surplus whose results are so manifest in the fine construction of houses and churches. Their abundant remains also show that the building indus-

<sup>33</sup> For the region and its economy, see Tate, *Campagnes*, 191–271.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–55, with details of operation, and 247 ff.

try was of considerable importance. Inscriptions indicate that the builders were local people, peasants like the others, who lived in the same houses and presumably practiced their trade in intervals between farming. Like the workers in the olive presses, they would have received salaries, so that a certain amount of cash could circulate in the local economy. The villages contain no identifiable shops or bazaars; local trade was apparently carried on in houses or stalls and quite probably at local or regional fairs. Surpluses were most probably sold to the nearby cities, of which there was a remarkable number. It is unlikely that the villagers dealt directly with any external markets, but rather used middlemen in the cities. In any case, trade was clearly of great importance and generated substantial profits that were invested in construction and accumulation of precious metals.

Understanding the history of this region depends on establishing a chronology for the buildings.<sup>35</sup> Although many, especially the churches, bear dated inscriptions, the vast majority offer no such obvious evidence. They are, however, built in varying styles of masonry that can be correlated with those of dated buildings to establish criteria applicable to the whole. Detailed and sophisticated work with the eye and the computer has made it possible to attribute virtually all the buildings to periods of thirty years or more and therefore to draw conclusions about the development of the region.

The statistics so created show that the whole region saw almost constant expansion for more than a century from about 350. Activity reached a peak in the late fifth century, then decreased until about 550. By that time, the whole region was far more densely populated than previously. Calculations have been based on the changing number of rooms in a village or district. This can be determined by the varying masonry styles of additions made to the houses. This is a sensible way of evaluating the progress of the villages, as many of them might have a seemingly stable number of houses, but the houses themselves were actually expanding, thus implying a real growth in population. By 550, there were anywhere from three to eight times as many rooms in the various parts of the region as there had been two centuries earlier. Although the rates of growth within the region were varied, the differences between the villages tend to level out, so that most came to be of similar size. The density of rooms per square kilometer rose even more dramatically: in the Jebel Halaqa, from four to thirty-three; in the Jebel Zawiye, where growth was generally slower, from six to twenty-five. The evidence consistently portrays an increasing density of population through late antiquity.

The increasing population did not bring impoverishment.<sup>36</sup> On the contrary, houses were constantly expanding, while the quality of construction and decoration improved. It would appear that the land was supporting a larger population at an equal or higher standard of living in the sixth century as it had at the beginning of the period. All the evidence indicates that this was a vital, expanding countryside whose population was able to generate and retain a considerable surplus. Part of the surplus went into the finely constructed houses, part of it was stored in the form of plate in the churches, or hoarded

<sup>35</sup>See the detailed discussion of Tate, *Campagnes*, 87–188, based on computer analysis, and (much easier to follow) his general history and conclusions, 275–350.

<sup>36</sup>For what follows, see the general conclusions of Tate, *Campagnes*, 343–50, and his discussion of earlier theories, 7–9.

in old coin.<sup>37</sup> Evidently, neither landlords nor the state, whose rapacity is usually stressed in discussions of this period, were capable of draining the wealth of this region, nor were the large cities that surrounded it so parasitic that they could consume its wealth. Late antiquity was plainly a thriving period, whose prosperity culminated in the late fifth and early sixth centuries.

If the theory that each village room housed one family is correct, it should be possible to make an approximate calculation of the population, allowing for wide margins of error.<sup>38</sup> With some seven hundred villages having an average of about a hundred rooms each, the total could be on the order of three hundred thousand for the entire hill country, the great majority of it in the territory of Antioch. Although such a figure may be wide of the mark, it could provide a point of reference and suggest that the total population of the region was extremely high, for these regions are marginal, settled after the more fertile plains have already been occupied. They, too, would have supported a large population in late antiquity, probably far more than these hills. There is no way to estimate the numbers, but the total for the entire territory of Antioch would have been impressively high.

The elegant stone masonry of houses and churches represents the most visible element of rural prosperity in this district, but there was much else. The local churches were also used as a store of wealth in the form of silver plate and liturgical objects, which accumulated over a long period of time and represented a substantial capital. The reconstruction of one such treasure (which had been dispersed after its discovery) hints at far greater local resources than might otherwise have been suspected.<sup>39</sup>

The village of Kaper Koraon, in fertile rolling country below the northern slopes of the Jebel Zawiye, contains few remains of antiquity, with nothing to suggest that it was of any special importance. Nor does it appear in the historical record. It possessed, however, a remarkable treasure of at least fifty-six silver objects, some of very high quality. They include patens, chalices, spoons, crosses, lamps, lampstands, and all kinds of liturgical vessels as well as sheathing for crosses and icons. Some bear figurative decoration in relief, and many have inscriptions.

The inscriptions show that several of the objects were gifts of imperial officials, notably Megas, who had a high position in the capital in the late sixth century. These were probably cases of local men who had successful careers for which they expressed their gratitude to the church of their native village and its saint, Sergius. Analysis of the inscriptions suggests that a few prosperous local families gave the silver to the church over a century, from about 540 to 640.

The dedications begin just after the Persian attack on Syria in 540, when Chosroes I systematically looted the whole area. Some of this silver may therefore have replaced goods lost then. Other objects have been associated with the Persian attack of 573 by their dedication for the repose of particular individuals in the years following that event.

<sup>37</sup> For a local example of a surprisingly rich hoard of gold coins, see below, p. 227.

<sup>38</sup> This is all highly speculative. Tate, *Campagnes*, 183–86, calls identification of individual rooms with family units “vraisemblable” and cites one inscription in its support. If the hypothesis has merit, a calculation would be worth making.

<sup>39</sup> Published and analyzed in M. M. Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures* (Baltimore, 1986), on which these remarks are based.

The latest datable pieces, of the reign of Heraclius or Constans II, show that generosity (and by implication prosperity) continued at least until the time of the Arab invasions.

Although this treasure is the most spectacular of the region, there is evidence to suggest that it was far from unique. Fragmentary treasures of a few objects, comparable in size and quality to those of Kaper Koraon, have been associated with two neighboring villages.<sup>40</sup> They suggest that such accumulations of capital may have been widespread in the region, and thus give a greater depth to the image presented by the architecture. Not only were the villagers prosperous, but they managed to save a good deal to glorify their churches and provide a store of wealth readily available in an emergency. These treasures, of course, were not melted down but buried for safekeeping at some such time, which, in the case of Kaper Koraon, was after the early seventh century—but how much later cannot be determined.

The treasures indicate that wealth could continue to accumulate (or be replaced) after the disasters of the seventh century, but the archaeological record suggests that the region entered a less felicitous time in the second half of the sixth century. After 550, growth appears to end; there are virtually no houses that can be assigned a later date. On the other hand, several churches bear inscriptions that continue through 610, after which they, too, offer no evidence. Most of this, however, involved not new construction but additions to existing buildings. It appears, therefore, that the period 550 to 610 was one of relative stagnation, when housing was not expanding but limited resources were still available for church construction. Expansion of churches would correspond with the continuing deposit of treasures in them.

No single factor explains the change after the mid-sixth century. The invasions that afflicted Antioch and destroyed Apamea are unlikely to have penetrated to this hill country, so unsuited to the movement of armies. Certainly, devastation of the cities would have had a highly negative effect on the local market economy. More serious could have been the effects of the plague that struck the whole empire in 542–544 and recurred in the Levant several times during the rest of the century. Although the cities suffered tremendously, the effect of the plague on the countryside is less evident. The numerous local climatic aberrations, with swarms of locusts, drought, and famine, on the other hand, could not have failed to afflict this well-populated countryside.

All these factors should have tended to reduce the rural population, but, as discussed below, there is evidence that it was stable or even increasing. Most probably, external circumstances produced a deteriorating economic situation that combined with the large village population to lower the local standard of living and eventually to lead to a kind of Malthusian crisis in which the people became increasingly poor.<sup>41</sup> The evidence to support this notion, and much of the general interpretation of these sites, came from the one village where there was some excavation.

Dehes is one of the larger villages of the Jebel Barisha east of Antioch. It has fifty-four houses with a total of 187 rooms, but no distinctive features (Figs. 8, 9). Its houses and churches are typical; it has produced few inscriptions, none of them dated. It was chosen for closer study largely because it seemed so typical. A series of sondages were

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 228–37, Beth Misona and Phela treasures.

<sup>41</sup>Tate, *Campaignes*, 340, calls this a “Malthusian crisis”; see his whole discussion, 335–42.

carried out in one complex of buildings, which had formerly been identified as a market, with stoas, an *andron*, or public meeting place, and an inn. The first result of the new study was to show conclusively that all the buildings were houses and that their occupants practiced a variety of activities including the raising of livestock (there were numerous mangers on the ground floors). Earlier theories of a variety of building types and functions and overwhelming concentration on olive production were laid to rest by these results.<sup>42</sup>

The village showed two main periods of activity, with the constructions of the fourth century being greatly expanded in the sixth.<sup>43</sup> Like the rest of the region, it appears to have reached its height in the sixth century, after which there is no evidence for further construction. This site, though, enabled the subsequent history of a village to be perceived in some detail and to be followed until a final abandonment.

Three dwellings, consisting of two, three, and four buildings, were studied; all show a similar development. After the expansion of the sixth century, there is a period of stagnation and deteriorating conditions but no abandonment. On the contrary, people still lived here in similar or greater numbers than before, and activity continued, but of a different order.

In the first house, there was a constant rise of ground level on both floors (all these houses have two stories) reflecting accumulations of dirt and debris.<sup>44</sup> In some cases, this was made into a floor of beaten earth, then eventually covered with a rough paving. One upstairs interior colonnade was blocked, apparently to provide an additional room, while one of the courts was divided by a rough wall. Coins and pottery allow these developments to be dated. Accumulation of rubbish seems to have been common in the seventh century; the crude pavements may belong to the eighth or later. In any case, the house was occupied through the ninth century.

The roof of one part of the second house collapsed in the mid-seventh century.<sup>45</sup> It was later propped up with beams, and a new floor was laid incorporating broken roof tiles. As the level of this interior floor continued to rise, soil was added to produce a level floor, which necessitated construction of a new threshold, apparently in the early eighth century. Likewise, soil accumulated in the courtyard and was periodically leveled; a poorly constructed dividing wall and a shed were built here at about the same time as the repairs done to the house. In house and court alike, occupation continued into the ninth century.

The third house shows a similar development, but lack of finds at an intermediate level may suggest that it was abandoned around the early seventh century.<sup>46</sup> In any case, it was reoccupied and continued in use, like the others, at least into the ninth century.

Pottery and coins provide the chronology and imply a great deal about the economic life of the village.<sup>47</sup> The pottery becomes abundant in the sixth century and remains so

<sup>42</sup>This account has followed the new interpretations based originally on this site and expanded by Tate. For a summary of earlier work on the region, see my review (above, note 32), 213–18.

<sup>43</sup>For what follows, see J.-P. Sodini et al., “Déhès (Syrie du nord), Campagnes I–III (1976–1978): Recherches sur l’habitat rural,” *Syria* 57 (1980), 1–304.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 14–93.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 93–144.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 144–80.

<sup>47</sup>Pottery: *ibid.*, 234–66; coins: 267–87.

through the eighth. It consists mostly of cooking ware of limited types without imported material, but still indicative of considerable activity in these houses. More surprising is the continuous sequence of coins from the early sixth through the early ninth century. They are particularly common for the seventh century, when they contain a large number of imitations of Byzantine coins of types often found in Syria but datable only to the second half of the century. In any case, they indicate an active money economy in the village and continuing economic relations with the outside world.

This evidence is all consistent and highly revealing. The villages, if conclusions may be drawn from what seems a typical example, were not abandoned at all after the sixth century, nor did their population decline drastically for a long time. Rather, it appears that they continued to be occupied but became increasingly poor and more squalid. There was no new construction, only efforts to maintain buildings that were centuries old. Little care was taken for appearances: rubble and dirt accumulated and were simply converted into floors, with an occasional effort to lay a pavement. When the roof fell down, it was simply propped up and its broken tiles incorporated into the pavement. Yet the inhabitants were still there and apparently in the same numbers. Except for part of the third house, which may have been abandoned for a time, occupation continued on the old scale and may even have increased. Division of rooms and courtyards could have been designed to accommodate more people.

The end did not come with the cessation of construction; the buildings were not simply abandoned as they stood, but contained a large population throughout the Umayyad period. The major change comes in later centuries, beyond the period considered here.

The evidence from these villages enables Antioch to be seen in the context of at least part of its territory. City and country both prospered until the time of Justinian, when the city began to suffer disaster after disaster. As late as 540, considerable resources were still available for major works of reconstruction. Thereafter, though, decline seems to have been constant, so that the Arabs would have captured a largely ruined city in 636. Its population was probably greatly reduced by then, ultimately because of the plague of 542 and subsequent years. Under the Umayyads, and continuing long into later centuries, Antakiyah had some importance as a military base and even flourished as a regional center, but never regained the size or importance it had had in the sixth century.

The development of the countryside is roughly parallel, except for demographics. The villages flourished until the mid-sixth century, when they began to stagnate. Their changed conditions surely reflect the reduction of the city and the markets it presented for their agricultural products, rather than any effect of the plague. As the economies of the city and its territory were always closely tied, drastic change in one necessarily involved the other. The villages, however, were not depopulated. On the contrary, the rural population seems to have remained high well into the Umayyad period. The only major change was increasing poverty and squalor, especially after the mid-seventh century. It would appear that the Arabs found a countryside with as many, or more, people as it could support and that their regime did nothing to change local conditions. The villages remained densely populated, increasingly poor, and overwhelmingly Christian. The region contains no Muslim buildings that may be assigned to these periods. In all this, Antioch and its territory invite comparison with the immediately adjacent city of Apamea, which has been excavated on a far greater scale.

## APAMEA

Apamea was one of the greatest cities of Syria, the center of a rich agricultural district and home of an aristocracy of landowners whose mansions dominate the site. Because of extensive excavations, often reported in considerable detail, it is possible to learn a great deal about its development. It provides some of the most important evidence for the period of transition, showing clearly a great change from a classical metropolis to a poor and crowded town full of ruins. Part of the cause lies in the historical circumstances, about which the sources reveal little in general, though they provide much detail of a few spectacular incidents, fundamental to the city's development.

The Persian king Chosroes I, after destroying Antioch, announced that he wanted to see Apamea.<sup>48</sup> The imperial ambassadors agreed on condition that he take only 1,000 pounds of silver from the city and return, leaving it unharmed. (They were, of course, in no position to resist if he chose not to keep the bargain.) The king soon arrived under the walls of the city with his entire army. The inhabitants, naturally in a state of panic because the defenses of the region seemed to have collapsed entirely, appealed to their archbishop Thomas, who brought out Apamea's most sacred relic, a piece of the Holy Cross, and carried it in procession around the church. As he moved, a miraculous flame followed him, illuminating the entire building, a clear (and accurate) sign that the city would be spared. The vast crowd that witnessed the miracle included the historian Evagrius, then a child, visiting the city with his parents from his native Epiphania.<sup>49</sup>

When Chosroes arrived, he asked the bishop (who was evidently in charge) whether the citizens planned to man the walls in defense. The bishop assured him that this was not the case, opened the gates, and welcomed the Persian king into the city. Once inside, Chosroes demanded not the 1,000 pounds agreed upon but many times that amount, in fact, all the treasures of gold and silver. As resistance was impossible, he accumulated a vast sum, even taking the gold and jeweled casing of the Cross, which the bishop surrendered on condition of being able to keep the holy relic itself. Then, behaving like an emperor, Chosroes ordered the customary chariot races to be held in the hippodrome, and favored the Greens because he knew that Justinian was a partisan of the Blues. When the Blue driver gained the lead, the king had him held back so that victory went to his own team. After that, he departed peacefully.

This narrative, from contemporary accounts, shows that the city was not destroyed in 540 but was no doubt severely impoverished. Even if Chosroes did not manage to find all the precious metal, much of the wealth of the church and city would have flowed into his hands, leaving the place with such diminished resources that some effect might be expected in the archaeological record. One tangible result of these events was soon evident in the cathedral, where the miracle of the fire was portrayed on the ceiling, only to perish when the church was destroyed in the next encounter with the Persians.<sup>50</sup>

In 573, Adarman, a general of Chosroes, who was still on the throne and once again at war with the Romans, made a sudden and unexpected attack across the Euphrates,

<sup>48</sup>The narrative is taken from Procopius, *Wars* 2.11.

<sup>49</sup>See his account of the miracle in *Hist. Eccl.* 4.26; it agrees very closely with that of Procopius.

<sup>50</sup>See the previous note. Another structure of the period, the poorhouse of St. Romanus restored by Justinian, is not discussed here because it appears to have been in the territory rather than the city of Apamea. Procopius, *Buildings* 5.9.27, describes it as *hypo Apameian*. It has not been located.

devastating a region that had known peace for a generation and was unprepared to resist.<sup>51</sup> After looting the suburbs of Antioch, he approached Apamea and camped outside the city, described as formerly prosperous and well populated but now in decline. Its walls had collapsed through age, so the inhabitants were in no position to resist, but offered the general a ransom, which he feigned to accept. When he entered the city, however, he looted it completely, then brought all the citizens and booty outside the walls and proceeded to burn Apamea from one end to the other. People and loot he took to Chosroes, then at the border fortress of Dara. Among the captives were the bishop, who administered the city, and the people from the surrounding villages; sources give the fantastic total of 292,000. Whatever the number of prisoners, there is no doubt that this event, well attested by contemporary writers, was an overwhelming catastrophe from which the city could not recover. When Antioch had suffered a similar fate in 540, the government had still had the resources to undertake extensive reconstruction. By now, however, the empire was relatively poor and overstrained and in no position to rebuild such a large city. There is no doubt that life continued and that some parts were restored, but Apamea had forever lost its ancient magnificence.

In May 611 the Persians, this time led by a new Chosroes, captured Apamea and held it for almost twenty years. Nothing is known of this period, nor of the brief Byzantine reoccupation that followed. The Arab conquest of 636 received only routine treatment in the accounts of these great events, but fragmentary information shows that life continued after it. Two bishops of this time are known: Thomarichos, who died in 666; and George, who moved to Martyropolis in 713, perhaps because the see could no longer be maintained.<sup>52</sup> The earliest Arab traveler, Yakubi, writing in 891, describes Apamea as an ancient Greek city on a lake, now in ruins.<sup>53</sup> Although it later recovered, Afamiyah was never of much consequence in either the Umayyad or Abbasid period: it was not an administrative center, nor were coins struck there. The sources thus all suggest that the destruction of 573 was a mortal blow to the city.

### *The Remains*

Apamea was a great Roman city, covering an area of about 3 km<sup>2</sup> (Fig. C). It was laid out on regular lines with streets that followed the points of the compass and divided it into blocks of 55 m on a side. Most of these *insulae* were occupied by the grand houses that were such a prominent feature of this city.<sup>54</sup> Apamea was the home of the rich landowners who formed the ruling class here as in most Roman cities. As late as 570, it was described as the place where all the nobility of Syria resided.<sup>55</sup> Though that is an exaggeration—Antioch, after all, was also the site of many great villas—the city was certainly the seat of the aristocracy who controlled the rich agricultural district of the plain and adja-

<sup>51</sup>The following account is based on three contemporary historians, who all wrote in the last two decades of the sixth century: John of Epiphania (in *FHG*, IV.275), his relative Evagrius (*Hist. Eccl.* 5.10), and John of Ephesus, *Hist. Eccl.* 6.6. Later sources are derivative, though Michael the Syrian (*Chronicle* 2.312) adds some details of Adaarman's campaign.

<sup>52</sup>Theophanes, *Chronographia* 348, 382, both casual mentions.

<sup>53</sup>Quoted in Le Strange, *Palestine* (above, note 8), 384.

<sup>54</sup>Discussion of these houses fills most of the volume *Apamée M13*.

<sup>55</sup>See the Piacenza pilgrim, in J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims* (Warminster, 1977), 89.



cent hill country. They lived in huge houses—as large as the fora of small North African towns—that often occupied entire *insulae*. In this part of the empire, the rich lived in the cities; houses in the countryside are almost invariably those of peasants, with none of the amenities, decor, or ceremonial spaces found there.

To judge by the number of mansions, found in all excavated parts of the site, this aristocracy dominated the city and thus patronized other construction. Although the public buildings are poorly known, Apamea contains several magnificent churches, most of them built on unusual or innovative plans. The remains of those, like the houses, illustrate both the wealth of the city and the enormous transformations it underwent. They show the profound change, more visible here than anywhere else in the region, from a great and sophisticated urban center to a squalid vast village, crowded with people and their animals living side by side.

### *Streets and Public Buildings*

The city is surrounded by a long circuit of walls only partially preserved and never studied. They were extensively rebuilt in the third century, when they came to incorporate a triple triumphal arch that stood outside the north gate. Later, a single gate with high niches and consoles that perhaps held statues was built directly behind it. This work may have been carried out in the time of Justinian, but its function, whether defensive or decorative, is uncertain.<sup>56</sup> In any case, the walls were apparently in good condition in 540, when Chosroes wanted to know whether they were going to be manned, but dilapidated by 573, when the city surrendered to the Persians without resistance.

The gate opened onto the boulevard that ran in an undeviating line due north and south through the center of the city, which it defined. A product of Roman city planning of the second century, the street (or *cardo*) was lined with colonnades for its full length of almost exactly 2 km. Its course was divided into three approximately equal parts by significant monuments: two tall votive pillars on the north and the crossing of the main east-west street (the *decumanus*) on the south (Fig. 10). The street was 20 m wide and paved with large polygonal limestone blocks; the colonnades on either side added another 17.5 m to the width. Behind them were various public buildings or the elegant two-story stone facades of the shops that lined most of the street.

This grand street existed without major change until the sixth century. By then, the colonnades were paved with mosaics and the walls painted (Fig. 11). The mosaics seem to have run the whole length of the street. One better-preserved section south of the junction with the *decumanus* bore figurative representations including items of significance in the local economy: a train of camels, representing the trade on which Apamea thrived, and a *noria*, or water wheel, evidence of the irrigation so important for the local agriculture. An inscription of 459 provides the date for that mosaic, which stretches for some 100 m.<sup>57</sup> The walls, though of good ashlar, were covered with stucco and painted. The decoration often imitated marble, or, more commonly in later periods, consisted of

<sup>56</sup>*AntCl* 5 (1936), 407 f; summary description in J. Balty, *Guide d'Apamée* (Brussels, 1981), 169, 183.

<sup>57</sup>See C. Dulière, *Mosaïques des portiques de la grande colonnade* (= *Fouilles d'Apamée*, Misc., fasc. 3) (Brussels, 1974).

a simple design of red lines on a white background. This system apparently continued through the sixth century.<sup>58</sup>

In the time of Justinian, parts of the street received a fine new paving of squared limestone blocks that replaced the badly worn Roman paving. The new surface, visible south of the junction with the *decumanus* and about 200 m north of it, was part of a complete rebuilding of the street. This included steps across its entire width that blocked the street to wheeled traffic. The pavement itself was slightly inclined down from the center; it met a new sidewalk on each side, which overrode the old stylobate and reduced the width of the street from 20 to 12 m. Pedestrians presumably used these, while pack animals took advantage of the open part of the street. A pavement of marble plaques that covered the mosaics of the colonnade completed the visible parts of the project. Beneath all this was a new system of drainage. Finds of pottery under the new paving date the work to the first half of the sixth century. It was thus probably one of the many projects completed here in the time of Justinian.<sup>59</sup>

Justinian also marked the street in a much more prominent way by erecting a tetrastylon, a monument composed of four monolithic columns 8 m high, crowned with meter-high capitals.<sup>60</sup> It is dated by its association with the new pavement and has naturally been compared with a similar structure on the main street of Ephesus. That apparently bore statues of the four evangelists, but the purpose of this monument has not been determined. In any case, it formed part of a monumental redesign of the street.

The grand colonnade led to many of the public monuments of the city as well as other utilitarian structures.<sup>61</sup> A Roman bath stood behind the street at the level of the first votive column; its later history has not been reported. About 300 m south, opposite the second votive column, was a large circular colonnaded building of uncertain purpose. Immediately south of it, below the second votive column and directly behind a small temple of Tyche, was the agora, a long rectangular space of some 45 × 150 m preceded by a colonnaded passage that connected it to the street. This entrance passage became a reservoir in the sixth century, though the agora itself seems to have undergone no significant change.<sup>62</sup>

A monumental nymphaeum adorned the street just above the crossing with the *decumanus*. It shared its water supply with a public latrine that lay behind it, off the street. This was built in the shape of a small atrium, with eighty to ninety seats on benches around a central colonnade. In the fifth or sixth century, the central basin was dug deeper, the balustrade between the columns was raised, and the floor was paved with mosaics.<sup>63</sup> Opposite the nymphaeum was a long hall that stretched about 100 m north from the *decumanus*, where it was entered by a monumental stairway. The structure was

<sup>58</sup>See L. Reekmans in *Apamée 1969*, 117–21.

<sup>59</sup>See, in general, Balty, *Guide*, 46–84 passim, and *Apamée 1969*, 41 f. Sondages in the street are reported in *Apamée 1969*, 61–68; the latest pottery they revealed (illustrated, 63) is Phocian Red Slip ware, form 3, dated to the late 5th/early 6th century.

<sup>60</sup>See the summary report in *Syria 60* (1983), 294.

<sup>61</sup>Most of the buildings that follow have not been published. For a general sketch, see Balty, *Guide*, 53, 64–77; cf. below, note 63, for the nymphaeum and latrine.

<sup>62</sup>Entrance: *Syria 60* (1983), 296, and *ibid.*, 63 (1986), 393 f.

<sup>63</sup>*Apamée M13*, 141–50.

open to the grand colonnade, had an apse at its north end, and was paved with *opus sectile*. It was apparently a product of this period, but its function is unknown.<sup>64</sup> Beyond the *decumanus* lay two great churches, discussed below. In sum, the grand colonnade was the focus of the city, providing a facade for and access to the main public buildings of all kinds, a role it maintained through the sixth century.

Later ages brought considerable change to the appearance and nature of this monumental area, evident in every part of it. The colonnades were all blocked with walls of spoils and rubble; other walls extended out into the street (Figs. 12, 13).<sup>65</sup> Whether the small rooms thus created were shops or dwellings has not been determined, but the variety of materials and construction techniques suggests several phases of occupancy over a considerable period. Ancient sarcophagi used as troughs for watering animals were installed at the base of a pillar between the two votive columns. The long hall at the junction of the two main streets was divided by intrusive walls, perhaps of houses, and much destroyed by the activities of a limekiln inserted into it.<sup>66</sup> All these constructions mark a clear break in the life of the city and a fundamental transformation in which the ancient regular plan was abandoned, open spaces were filled in the most casual fashion, and a rural appearance replaced that of the ancient city.

Dating these transformations would be of great value in understanding the development of the city, but little evidence has been discovered. The most substantial consists of coins found in blocking walls in the colonnade of the southern part of the street, near the Atrium Church.<sup>67</sup> They were originally attributed to 627–629, to suggest that the period of Persian occupation was one of serious disintegration of the regular urban plan and that this time was one of relative anarchy. Closer inspection of the coins reveals, however, that they are imitations of Byzantine types, struck some time after the Arab conquest.<sup>68</sup> The initial stages of transformation, then, may perhaps be assigned to the middle of the seventh century or later.

<sup>64</sup>Briefly reported in *Syria* 60 (1983), 296.

<sup>65</sup>The excavator, J. C. Balty, has an explanation of these transformations (*Apamée* 1969, 41 f, and *Apamée* 1972, 17 f, repeated in *Ktema* 2 [1977], 11–14) that seems very difficult to accept. First, he supposes that the closing of the street to wheeled traffic in the 6th century meant that it lost its role as the main street of the city in favor of cross or side streets. But this neglects the significance of pack animals, which could still use the street, as well as Roman legislation forbidding wheeled traffic within cities in any case. Then he postulates that, as a consequence, the shops began to expand out onto the sidewalks, as the street was now reserved for pedestrians, and that this formed the genesis of medieval *sugs* such as found in other cities. There is actually no evidence that the street was used by pedestrians or that such *sugs* were ever established in Apamea. Finally, he proposes that the colonnades, now freed from their crowd of pedestrians by construction of the sidewalks, came to be used by wheeled traffic. A moment's visualization of chariots roaring by in front of the shops will not inspire confidence. This notion is based on what appears to be wheel ruts in the pavement of the colonnade opposite the Atrium Church, but in fact these are neither deep nor consistent and may represent something quite different, such as bases for the walls of intrusive structures.

<sup>66</sup>Troughs: *AntCl* 1 (1932), 237; long hall: *Syria* 60 (1983), 296; the other changes have not been reported but are manifest in most parts of the colonnade.

<sup>67</sup>Reported in *Apamée*, I.1, 136, nos. 4 and 24; for their proposed significance, see *Apamée* 1969, 42, and *Apamée* 1972, 18.

<sup>68</sup>Thanks to clear illustration of the coins, it is possible to see that they belong to an enormously common series of imitations, found all over the Levant but rarely studied. Note particularly in no. 4 (see the previous note) the absence of crosses on the crowns of the three figures, and the backward N in the ANNO of the reverse. This coin appears to be unique, and may be a prototype for an abundant series of "Arab-Byzantine" coins struck at Tiberias in Palestine, also undated, but certainly issued under Umayyad authority. Coin 24 is

The agora underwent similar transformation, apparently in two phases. In the earlier phase, brick walls were inserted into the open spaces; subsequently numerous small troughs were installed, with rings for attaching animals between the columns. The agora would appear to have become a sort of caravansary. The reservoir at its entrance manifests three periods of deposits, one ending in 573 (and thus representing the destruction of the city), another through 613 (the Persian conquest), and a third continuing into the mid-seventh century. Much of the actual structure was destroyed when a limekiln was set up nearby.<sup>69</sup> The circular building north of the agora succumbed to a similar fate as its marble columns and decoration were burned into lime.<sup>70</sup>

The nymphaeum was also transformed. Its basin was largely filled with debris, apparently at a time when the water supply was no longer functioning, and in the seventh century a tomb of a type found elsewhere on the site was inserted above it.<sup>71</sup> Evidence for the latrine is the most specific: coins found there cover the period from Justinian to Heraclius (613/6), to indicate continuous use. Three later pieces of the mid-seventh century may indicate reuse, but nothing later than that was found; this building, then, was definitely out of use after the seventh century.

The grand colonnade was intersected by side streets at regular intervals of 110 m, and passages led through the back wall halfway between each street. The main east-west street, the southern *decumanus*, crossed the boulevard about 1,500 m south of the city gate; it, too, was lined with colonnades. The crossing was marked by two triple arches that continued the colonnade of the *cardo*.<sup>72</sup> The *decumanus* led to two of the most important buildings of the city, the theater, about 500 m to the west, and the Cathedral, an equal distance to the east.

The *decumanus*, in the area near the Cathedral, was lined with shops, one of which contained a kiln for making lamps. More than three hundred of these were discovered unused, thrown into the portico in front of the shops. The numerous coins from these shops stop with the issues of Justin I (518–527), suggesting that, in this area at least, serious damage (as from an earthquake) was never repaired.<sup>73</sup> Shops on the other side of the street, however, manifest the same blocking and extension of small rooms as those of the main street (Fig. 14). These structures have not been dated.<sup>74</sup>

Little is known of the later history of the theater, built against the slope of the hill that came to form the medieval citadel of Qal'at al-Mudīq, the successor of Apamea. "Medieval" walls discovered on the *cavea* and in front of the stage building suggest that it was eventually fortified, a work attributed to the "Arabs" but probably of the Byzantine reconquest in the tenth century or even later.<sup>75</sup>

---

more typical of the imitations of coppers of Constans II that seem to have formed the bulk of Syrian currency in the years after the Arab conquest.

<sup>69</sup> Agora: *Apamée* 1972, 22–26, with reference to "Byzantine and Arab" coins only. Entrance: *Syria* 63 (1986), 394, dated by coins, but the nature and significance of the deposits have not been explained.

<sup>70</sup> *AntCl* 1 (1932), 240.

<sup>71</sup> *Apamée* M13, 148–50.

<sup>72</sup> *AntCl* 10 (1941), 115 ff.

<sup>73</sup> Balty, *Guide*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> But see the discussion, below, of the Triclinos House, which lies just behind these shops.

<sup>75</sup> Walls are reported in *Apamée* 1972, 143–53. Coins, however, are of the Byzantine reconquest (*Apamée* 1969, 91 n. 4), while the pottery is primarily of the 12th–13th century (M. Rogers, *ibid.*, 253–70).

*The Churches*

Most of the excavated buildings of Apamea are in the southern part of the city on or near the grand colonnade or the southern *decumanus*. They include three large churches—the Rotunda, the Atrium Church, and the so-called Cathedral—and three lavish houses: the Triclinos House adjacent to the Cathedral, the Pilaster House on the *decumanus*, and the Console House adjoining it on the north. This best-known part of the city provides extensive evidence for the periods in question.

The size and location of the Rotunda, which occupies a double block at the intersection of the two streets, suggest a building of considerable importance.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, it is preserved only at ground level and has been only partially excavated. Consequently, its history is unknown. The church consists of a vast rotunda with an interior colonnade 25 m in diameter and projecting semicircular niches on the northeast and southeast. The rotunda led through a broad rectangular transept to a large round apse whose bema extended out into the transept. Additional rooms flanked the transept and extended behind the apse. The room south of the apse, which had entrances to both apse and transept, was paved with a fine *opus sectile*. The eastern part consisted of a rectangular colonnaded court that led to the grand colonnade. Neither the date nor purpose of this impressive building has been determined, but the close resemblance of its plan to that of the round church on the acropolis of Scythopolis invites comparison; that, too, is undated.<sup>77</sup> The suggestions that this church is of the Justinianic period, and that it was possibly built to house Apamea's most famous relic, a piece of the True Cross allegedly brought to the city by St. Helena, are worth considering.<sup>78</sup>

Evidence for the excavated Atrium Church (Fig. 15), which stands on the grand colonnade opposite and just south of the Rotunda, is far more abundant.<sup>79</sup> It reveals several stages of reconstruction and evidence for changing occupation in a late period. The church now visible replaced a smaller structure of the early fifth century that in turn had been built over a synagogue.<sup>80</sup> It is of substantial size, measuring 38 × 36 m and spreading over 1,120 m<sup>2</sup>, and manifests an unusual plan. The main entrance was from the *cardo*, where the wall behind the east colonnade was pierced by five doors leading to an atrium of 35 × 22 m. Simple geometric mosaics decorated the floors of its colonnades, while the central part was paved with marble. Five doors on the east led into the church, while rooms on the south gave access to a paved hall adjacent to the south aisle of the church and a series of rooms whose significance will be considered below.

The central part of the church formed a rectangle much more broad than long. It was divided into two spaces: the narthex and side aisles, which may have supported galleries, separated from the rectangular nave by arcades on columns. The nave was in turn connected to a square chancel flanked by reliquary chapels that led to the main apse, heavily constructed, polygonal on the outside, and containing a *synthronon*. The north chapel

<sup>76</sup>See the summary description in *Apamée 1969*, 39, and Balty, *Guide*, 148.

<sup>77</sup>See G. M. Fitzgerald, *Beth-Shan Excavations, 1921–1923: The Arab and Byzantine Levels* (Philadelphia, 1931), 18–26.

<sup>78</sup>The association of the church with the relic was suggested by L. Reekmans in a discussion: *Apamée 1972*, 247.

<sup>79</sup>Reported in great if often confusing detail in *Apamée*, I.1. For the 6th-century church, see 27–82.

<sup>80</sup>For this early church, see *Apamée*, I.1, 13–22; the synagogue has never been published.

sheltered three marble coffers, so constructed that holy oil could be poured over the relics and collected in small bottles. According to the inscriptions on them, one contained relics of Sts. Cosmas and Damian and others, and the second those of St. Theodore and other saints; the third was uninscribed.<sup>81</sup>

Although little remains above ground, it appears that the church was built of regular limestone ashlar blocks, solid in the apses and elsewhere alternating with triple bands of brick. Such masonry finds far more parallels in Constantinople or Asia Minor than in Syria.<sup>82</sup>

The church was extensively decorated in a lavish style.<sup>83</sup> In the north reliquary chapel, which had been damaged by fire, a pavement of fine *opus sectile* replaced earlier mosaics.<sup>84</sup> Similar decorative cut marble covered the side aisles and apparently the entire central nave. The walls were revetted with marble or covered with mosaics, column capitals were painted in red and gold, and stucco adorned the arches of the arcades.

The plan of this church, which has attracted little attention, is actually quite remarkable. While its side aisles and prominent apse suggest the rudiments of a basilical plan, it far more resembles a centrally planned church of a kind often associated with a dome (though there was clearly not a dome here). Similarities may be observed with the plan of the fifth-century church at Meriamlik in Cilicia or basilica B at Philippi of ca. 540. In some ways, it seems a precursor of the plan of the church of the Dormition at Nicaea, which may have been built as early as the late sixth century. The closest actual parallel to the plan, however, is the reception room of the cathedral of Parenzo, a structure with close Syrian connections built around 570. All this suggests a date in the age of Justinian.<sup>85</sup>

The excavators have reached a similar conclusion by a different route, attributing a major destruction of Apamea to earthquakes in 526 and 528.<sup>86</sup> These, however, are attested chiefly for Antioch, which they leveled, and also for Seleucia and Laodicea, both on the coast. Even if an earthquake whose epicenter was some 90 km away could have inflicted such damage on Apamea, there is no evidence at all that these earthquakes did so. They seem to have represented the movement of a fault along the coast rather than in the Orontes Valley. Hence they cannot be used to provide evidence for anything at Apamea. That does not mean that there were no such earthquakes here, merely that they are not attested.

<sup>81</sup> For these reliquaries, see *Apamée*, I.1, 57–64.

<sup>82</sup> The excavators remark on the probable influence of the capital on plan and material: *Apamée*, I.1, 141 f.

<sup>83</sup> For the mosaics and *opus sectile*, see P. Donceel-Voûte, *Les pavements des églises byzantines de Syrie et du Liban* (Louvain, 1988), 216–25.

<sup>84</sup> The excavators (*Apamée*, I.1, 64–69) present a different interpretation of the remains, by maintaining that the entire church was seriously damaged by the fire and that the decoration represents restoration after that event, datable, perhaps, to 573. As far as I can determine, the fire is attested only in the martyrion, which in any case was incorporated from the earlier structure. It seems more probable that there was only one major 6th-century phase in the church.

<sup>85</sup> A Justinianic date is also supported by the masonry of the side apses, which closely resembles that of the cathedral, datable to this period (see below): *Apamée*, I.1, pl. xxiii. For plans of the other possibly related churches, see R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture* (Harmondsworth, 1986), 245, 253, 290, 280.

<sup>86</sup> *Apamée*, I.1, 64–69. As these earthquakes recur frequently in the publications, they are worth a digression here.

In any case, the sixth-century church underwent some modifications. A small baptistery with a rectangular font revetted with marble was added to one of the rooms south of the church. Structural changes included the division of the west aisle or narthex by two heavy walls adjacent to the main entrance and the creation of a porch outside that door.

A final rebuilding took place at a time when the life of the city had profoundly changed.<sup>87</sup> In this, the church still maintained its original size and plan, but its new masonry incorporated spoils from the church itself, the street, and other buildings. The north wall of the atrium, and much of that of the north chapel, was reinforced by a second wall that used many spoils, including pieces from the arcades of the nave. Great buttresses of spoils—cornices, doorjambs, and pieces apparently from the colonnade of the street—were built out over the east-west street that ran along the church (Fig. 16). The space between the buttresses, which closed the street to circulation, was filled with rubble. The main apse received a heavy reinforcement on a deep foundation that included cornices, column bases and drums, and some pieces with the original stucco still adhering to them. A new paving of well-cut limestone blocks covered the old mosaics and *opus sectile* of the nave and atrium, and the colonnades of the atrium were suppressed. The martyrion, however, was maintained, its reliquary coffers supported by reused capitals. The rebuilding seems to have been occasioned by an earthquake rather than a fire.

This work implies a severe break in the life of the city. The church itself, along with the main colonnaded street and undetermined other parts of the city, had evidently been ruined, but resources were still available for a major reconstruction in which the old luxury was abandoned, to be replaced by a functional style. Adjacent streets were closed, and the appearance of the whole district became far less regular and elegant.

The church eventually became the center of a graveyard.<sup>88</sup> Bodies were buried under the paving of the atrium and in the fill between the external buttresses: fifteen graves were uncovered in the church and thirty-two in what had been the street to the north. The bodies were laid on their backs, with the feet to the east, indicating that the burials were Christian and implying that the church was still functioning at the time they were made.

The final deterioration of the church took place in two stages. In the first stage, most of the openings were carefully blocked with walls of mortared rubble. A basin, apparently associated with the manufacture of glass, was installed in the western part of the atrium, and two rooms were built in what had been its south colonnade. No traces of occupation, however, were found within the church itself. In a final period, which may have extended over a considerable time, walls of spoils, usually without mortar, were chaotically inserted into the building and the open spaces. By this time, the church was clearly no longer functioning.

The sequence of development is clear enough: the elegant Justinianic church, after some minor modifications, was extensively rebuilt with spoils, then blocked in two stages, the first of which indicates continuing systematic organization. The problem is that of chronology. Although dates have been proposed for the various stages, the evidence is open to question and interpretation. Any discussion needs to begin with the greatest

<sup>87</sup> *Apamée*, I.1, 83–92.

<sup>88</sup> For the graveyard and the last stages of the church, see *Apamée*, I.1, 97–110.

break in the life of the city: its destruction by the Persians in 573, a catastrophic event that involved the ruin and depopulation of the entire city. Urban life did not come to an end with this, but it surely had a major effect on all the buildings of the city.

It has been supposed that the sixth-century church had to be rebuilt after a fire, which has been associated with the Persian attack. If this were correct, it would show that the city rose from its ashes with success and opulence and that great resources were available for the rebuilding of the church in the old style, in other words, that Apamea was still vital and prosperous. Evidence for dating this stage, however, is extremely tenuous, consisting of only one coin of 575 found in the rebuilt foundations of the apse of the north aisle.

The reconstruction that uses many spoils is certainly indicative of a major change in the life of the city. The large number of spoils that it incorporates shows that destruction had been extensive. This has been attributed to an earthquake or perhaps the Persian occupation of Apamea in 613, although there is no indication that the Persians did any damage to the city on that occasion. The most significant evidence for dating this work seems to come from the large north buttresses.<sup>89</sup> Coins found in the fill between them are all earlier than 573. The fill was evidently brought here from some ruined part of the city, as it is not stratified but contains a variety of material. That would tend to suggest substantial reconstruction (and clearing of other sections) after the Persian destruction.<sup>90</sup>

Material associated with the burials is less helpful for this question, because many of the graves were dug into the fill just discussed. This includes pottery of the seventh to eighth centuries as well as coins from the fifth and later. Well datable objects such as coins, however, were rarely found in unambiguous association with the graves. Much material of the mid-seventh century and later found in and around the graveyard on the street suggests that the transformation of that area began after the Arab conquest.<sup>91</sup> One of the tombs there produced a carbon 14 date of ca. 700, and a coin associated with the glass manufacturing in the atrium was Abbasid, showing that such activity continued into the ninth century.

The evidence, though often difficult to interpret, reveals a general development. The Atrium Church was completely rebuilt in a lavish style in the time of Justinian; it was probably severely damaged in the Persian sack of 573, then rebuilt on the same plan but with much material reused from the church itself and other buildings. The heavy buttressing on the north side blocked the street that had existed there. At some point, debris from ruined parts of the city was brought in to fill the area between the buttresses, which was eventually used as a graveyard. Burials were also made in the atrium. These

<sup>89</sup>*Apamée*, I.1, 103 f; coins: *ibid.*, 110.

<sup>90</sup>Coins: *Apamée*, I.1, 110. On the other hand, some of the deposits described and illustrated (nos. 67.I.20, 67.I.21, and 67.I.39: *ibid.*, 111–33) contain Umayyad pottery and lamps as well as material from the 6th century. It seems difficult to determine how the fill was distinguished from goods deposited with the burials. My thanks to Shulamit Hadad for help in analyzing the pottery.

<sup>91</sup>The evidence of the coins, tabulated in an appendix (*Apamée*, I.1, 136 f), is far from clear. Those described as lying beneath the necropolis (nos. 6–9, 11, and 19) range in date from Anastasius to the mid-8th century, while those found on the street, and thus perhaps lost before the filling was deposited (nos. 10, 13–17), are mostly of the 6th century, with one each of Heraclius and Constans II. This may suggest that the space was filled in the mid-7th century. Certainty is impossible because the insertion of the graves has frequently disturbed the stratigraphy.



graveyards seem to have begun in the mid-seventh century. At about the same time, industrial installations occupied the atrium, where they continued into the Abbasid period. By then the church building was blocked up. Eventually the whole area was chaotically occupied. There seems to be no evidence for dating the last stages.

The Cathedral of Apamea stood on the *decumanus*, some 500 m northeast of the Atrium Church.<sup>92</sup> It had a grand entrance from the street, where a monumental staircase built over the colonnade extended into the street (Fig. 17). This led to a square colonnaded courtyard, some 40 m on a side, with a fountain in the center and mosaics in the porticoes. The church itself, on the south side of the court, could be entered from the north or west. In plan, it was a domed tetraconch about 50 m wide, with the dome supported on four massive pillars joined by exedral colonnades.<sup>93</sup> The eastern pillars, though, were connected by a stone apse, beyond which projected a massively constructed chancel containing a *synthronon* and altar. As usual, the church was richly decorated: the floors were covered with mosaics and *opus sectile* (Fig. 18) and the walls revetted with marble.

If this church was indeed the cathedral, it contained the relic of the Holy Cross described in connection with the Persian visit of 540. No part of the building has been identified as the home of this famous object, but other relics were discovered. Coffers containing relics of Sts. Jude, Callinicus, John, and the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, and another without inscription, were set up in the chancel. A channel leading from them through the masonry of the apse allowed holy oil to be poured over the relics and received outside the church.<sup>94</sup>

Like that of the Atrium Church, the plan of the Cathedral is more centralized than basilical. Its central and eastern parts show a strong affinity to the cathedral of St. John, built in Ephesus by Justinian around 540. Such a resemblance is appropriate, for this church can be dated quite closely. The pavement leading from the street to the church contains a marble plaque showing that it was laid by the bishop Paul in 529.<sup>95</sup> Similarly, the figurative mosaic in the tetraconch names the same Paul, as does the *opus sectile* of the ambulatory and one of the capitals of the central columns. Paul is a known historical figure who defended Orthodoxy against the Monophysites at a council in Constantinople in 536; he was evidently a prelate of considerable influence and accomplishment.<sup>96</sup> The church, then, is a structure of the early years of Justinian's reign.

The Cathedral was the center of a whole complex of outbuildings. Parallel to the

<sup>92</sup>The church has not been published; see the sketch in Balty, *Guide*, 106–15, and the preliminary report in *Apamée* 1972, 187–205. It is considered the cathedral because it was built by the archbishop Paul, a hypothesis that receives support from the similarity of its plan with that of the cathedral of St. John in Ephesus (see below).

<sup>93</sup>For the plan of this church, I agree with the interpretation of Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements*, 203–15, esp. 204, 212 n. 36. The excavators supposed that the church was originally a tetraconch, into which the pillars were inserted, to produce two distinct periods. In addition to the implausibility of such massive construction leaving an earlier plan intact (the work has only to be visualized), the photographs in *AntCl* 10 (1941), 120 f, and *ibid.*, 4 (1935), 201 f, show clearly that the pillars are primary, with the interior apse added to them.

<sup>94</sup>Reliquaries: *AntCl* 4 (1935), 201 f; channel: Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements*, 204.

<sup>95</sup>Date as corrected by Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements*, 210.

<sup>96</sup>For Paul and his work, see J. Balty, "L'évêque Paul et le programme architectural et décoratif de la cathédrale d'Apamée," in *Mélanges d'histoire ancienne et d'archéologie offertes à Paul Collart* (Lausanne, 1976), 31–46.

projecting chapel, but not connected with it, were two apsidal rooms and one rectangular. The northern room was a funerary chapel, with systematic burials in the floor. Beyond it was a group of rooms around a court, much disturbed by later occupation. The chapel south of the church, finely paved with *opus sectile*, had an altar in its apse. Between the bema and the funerary chapel was a square baptistery with three apses containing the baptismal font and reliquaries. There was another baptistery south of it, connected with a large room where banquets for the catechumens were held.

West of the church and on axis with it was another colonnaded court with rooms around it, and north of that yet another that led to a Roman bath that had been incorporated into the complex. These may have formed part of the palace of the bishop. The first court is aligned with the largest ceremonial room of the adjacent Triclinos House (discussed below), with which this complex may have been connected. The Cathedral and its dependencies thus formed a vast complex, comparable to such others in Syria as those of Gerasa or Rusafa, which manifested the power and wealth of the local metropolitan bishop.

Like the Atrium Church, the Cathedral complex saw major changes. In the first phase, seventeen shops were built into the porticoes of the north (entrance) colonnaded square and over its pavement. Another group occupied the court at the northeast corner of the complex. Their regular arrangement attests a degree of organization, and finds reveal the function of some of them. These include many objects of iron: hinges, pieces of door frames, a folding stool, and numerous nails. One room contained a bronze tripod. These were evidently shops, perhaps forming a kind of market. They apparently contain little material for dating.

The entire area east of the church became a graveyard, whose burials have the head to the west, and are thus Christian. Like the Atrium Church, the Cathedral was evidently regarded as a suitable place for burial. Tombs in the elaborate apsidal south chapel built on or into the marble floor contained lamps that have been dated to the seventh–eighth centuries, as well as a coin of the seventh century.

The fate of the church itself is less clear. If it was the cathedral, it was burned down in 573, as the contemporary account clearly states. Yet no traces of destruction have been reported, any more than any evidence of later rebuilding; nor was the floor disturbed. It is possible that the ruined structure was simply abandoned but still considered sacred enough that nothing was built inside it, though there was much activity around. Alternatively, it may not have been the cathedral at all.

At a later period, the large north court saw occupation of a different kind. After the colonnades had collapsed, their drums were rolled between the remaining bases to form crude walls for stalls. The pavement was lifted except where it served as floors for the small rooms built onto it. These structures are without plan and contain virtually no archaeological material. Their dating, therefore, has not been determined.

The development of the Cathedral resembles that of the Atrium Church, though the evidence is less clear. It was a major construction of the time of Justinian, datable to 529, the center of an elaborate complex of buildings. These continued to function normally until a group of shops was regularly built into one of the courts at an uncertain time. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Christian burials were inserted into two of the chapels. Finally, the whole complex fell into chaotic disrepair, with casual reuse of its building

material. Both churches became the centers of graveyards and show deterioration of their fabric in two distinct stages.

These were far from being the only churches in Apamea, but no others have been excavated.<sup>97</sup> Among them is a vast basilica, as large as any of the churches studied, near the grand colonnade in the northern part of the city. It is the only basilica within the walls. Another, much smaller, stood about 500 m beyond the north gate; being surrounded by buildings, it was probably a monastery.<sup>98</sup>

The remains of the excavated churches provide no clear evidence for their history after the middle of the seventh century, but there is almost nothing to suggest that Apamea remained anything but a Christian city in the first centuries after the Muslim conquest. The only indication of a Muslim presence is a small mosque installed in the northern part of the grand colonnade.<sup>99</sup> It consists of a single chamber with a *mihrab* on the south, preceded by a small paved court. Stairs behind it led to a platform apparently used for the call to prayer. The building is very small and fits entirely within the colonnade; it has not been dated. Its position on top of a meter of debris suggests that it was not built immediately after the conquest, but its simple plan might indicate a relatively early date. In any case, it would appear that Islam was barely established in Apamea, if at all, during the centuries here considered. The mosque could even have been built for travelers passing along the street, which remained part of the main route along the Orontes Valley.

### *The Houses*

Apamea, as already noted, was the seat of a rich aristocracy whose wealth was powerfully reflected in grandiose houses. Since many of these residences have been excavated or at least explored, they provide enormously valuable evidence for the social and economic development of the city and reveal a series of transformations essential for understanding the development of the region. Together with the churches, they provide the main source for the history of Apamea in the period considered here.

The axis of the Cathedral and the court immediately before it would lead, if projected, to the center of one of the main apsidal reception rooms of a huge villa, the Triclinos House, immediately to the west.<sup>100</sup> It was set back from the street, with a garden or open space on its north, and contained some eighty rooms arranged around one large colonnaded peristyle and two smaller ones. Three large apsidal halls, evidently the main reception rooms, abutted on the peristyle and were in turn connected with a labyrinth of smaller rooms. An upper floor that rose above the central part of the house was reached by a monumental stairway; the north gallery of the peristyle attained the height of the colonnades of the main street.

The whole villa appears to be of the fourth century, the date of its earliest decoration, and may have served as the residence of a high official, perhaps the governor. The house was decorated with great luxury. The main reception halls had carpets of mosaics show-

<sup>97</sup> See the list in *Apamée* 1972, 248.

<sup>98</sup> *AntCl* 9 (1939), 206.

<sup>99</sup> Briefly described in Balty, *Guide*, 52; cf. *Apamée* M13, 95.

<sup>100</sup> The excavations are not yet published; see the summaries in Balty, *Guide*, 85 f, and esp. *Apamée* 1969, 105–15.

ing landscapes and mythical figures; simpler geometric mosaics adorned many other rooms. The walls of the north reception room were decorated with an elaborate cut marble, and the capitals of its facade bore heads among the leaves. Elsewhere, including the upper floor, there was much decoration in stucco, marble, and mosaic. Rebuilding in the fifth century resulted in only minor changes to the plan but added a splendid mosaic of hunting Amazons.<sup>101</sup>

A devastating fire brought major change to the western part of the house, where the upper floor was destroyed and the main reception hall and its dependencies badly damaged. An iron stool, door hinges, and window grilles were found burned into the mosaics, together with coins, the latest of Justinian. As a result, the north reception room was rebuilt with *opus sectile* over its mosaic and a nymphaeum installed in its apse. Its role as the central reception room was taken by the east apsidal chamber, which received a magnificent mosaic with a hunting scene, dated to 539 by its inscription.<sup>102</sup> In other rooms, painted plaster and polychrome stucco were used in the redecoration. It was probably at this time that a small bath was added to the complex. At this stage, the owner evidently had sufficient resources to undertake a major restoration that maintained the original splendor of the house.

In a later period, the nature of the house completely changed. The colonnades of the peristyle were blocked to create a series of small rooms (Fig. 19). Cisterns, brick ovens, stone vats, basins, and storage jars were found throughout the complex, even inserted into the mosaics of the most luxurious rooms (Fig. 20). Plainly, the old order had broken down, and the house was occupied in a completely different way by a different kind of people. The chronology of these changes, which may have extended over a long period, has not been determined.

North of the house, in an area that seems to have been left open, an entire complex of more than fifty small rooms filled the space between the house and the *decumanus* and extended out onto the pavement of the street. Remains of cisterns, basins, mills, presses, and crucibles suggest commercial activity, perhaps a series of workshops, all clustered together in no evident pattern. The walls show numerous stages of blocking and transformation that suggest long occupation. Although the chronology has not been established, pottery and coins of the seventh century probably date the beginning of the transformation of this area.<sup>103</sup> In the great house itself, the rooms around the peristyle perished in a fire that brought down the roof and upper story. No evidence for dating was discovered.

The district adjacent to the Cathedral, like most of the center of Apamea, was dominated by the large and luxurious houses that are such a mark of the entire city. One of them, the Pilaster House, stood immediately opposite the Cathedral, on the north side of the *decumanus*.<sup>104</sup> Modern road construction has obliterated its southern half, but enough survives to reveal a peristyle house of 55 × 35 m, with rooms arranged around the central

<sup>101</sup> Discussed in C. Dulière, *La mosaïque des Amazones* (= *Fouilles d'Apamée, Misc.*, fasc. 1) (Brussels, 1968), and dated to the second half of the 5th century.

<sup>102</sup> See J. Balty, *La grande mosaïque de chasse du Triclinos* (= *Fouilles d'Apamée, Misc.*, fasc. 2) (Brussels, 1969), who advances the theory that the inscription refers only to the restoration, not the original mosaic whose style, it seems, would be more appropriate to an earlier period.

<sup>103</sup> *Apamée 1969*, 114 n. 2, mentions coins of Constans II and the Umayyads but gives no indication of their quantity or findspots. The sondages in this area, reported in *Apamée 1972*, 113–40, show that it was empty, with no material from the 4th–6th centuries.

<sup>104</sup> *Apamée M13*, 79–95.

court. The largest, on the north, had an inner raised section and stood higher than the colonnade. On the east, another large room apparently adjoined a second court that stretched to the next street. Geometric mosaics, some elaborate, decorated the floors.

A substantial rebuilding resulted in only minor changes to the plan. A fountain was added in one of the rooms off the colonnade, with a reservoir and latrine behind it and a fine limestone pavement in front of the fountain and in the central colonnades. The fountain was connected with the city water supply. It was perhaps at this time that the southern colonnade of the peristyle was blocked off to become an apsidal space, perhaps a kind of reception chamber, with a mosaic pavement.<sup>105</sup> Walls of this period were decorated with painted stucco. Coins found in the latrine suggest an early-sixth-century date for the rebuildings.

The house subsequently deteriorated in two stages. At first, some parts were abandoned: the fountain and latrine no longer functioned, and the space behind became a dump. The southern part of the house, partially destroyed, was abandoned. Many openings, including the spaces between the columns of the peristyle, were blocked with masonry that imitates the late antique, using many spoils and roof tiles in place of bricks. Large rooms were divided, often into several much smaller units. The main reception room, for example, eventually was divided into six small spaces. The inhabitants of this period consumed a fair amount of chicken and pork, somewhat less beef and fish, and a preponderance of meat from sheep and goats. By this time, horses and donkeys were also present in the house.<sup>106</sup>

In the second stage, division increased, using much poorer masonry and following no recognizable plan. Occupation became concentrated in the central court and the small rooms around it. Each of these (several of which were built into the former colonnades) had its own threshold and door, but some were so small as to be suitable only for animals. Bones indicate that donkeys, horses, and an occasional camel were to be found in the house and that sheep and goats still provided most of the meat in its occupants' diet, which included beef and chicken but less pork and fish than previously.<sup>107</sup> Other rooms were built out into the street. The old paving blocks were torn up and replaced by stone or broken brick. A well was dug into the room with the fountain, and basins, perhaps associated with winemaking, were installed elsewhere.

Coins found in the dump behind the fountain range from the period of Justinian to the mid-seventh century, suggesting that the first stage of transformation may have begun in the sixth or early seventh century. Most of those from the peristyle and adjacent rooms are of the seventh and eighth centuries, indicating a concentration of activity there. An Abbasid potsherd (8th–9th century) found in the rough wall that divides a large chamber in the eastern part of the house shows that changes were continuing at that time. The pottery in general continues into the tenth century, indicating a long period of occupation after the house had changed its nature.

This house was adjoined on the north by the Console House, a large Roman structure

<sup>105</sup> Noël Duval, in *Apamée M13*, 471, suggested the function of the apsidal space. The excavators assign its construction to a second phase of rebuilding, for which no evidence was presented. Rather, the fine masonry of the apse (much superior to the mortared rubble of the other repairs) suggests that it dates from an early period of the house.

<sup>106</sup> See *Apamée M13*, 308, with the table on p. 349.

<sup>107</sup> See the previous note.



of  $52 \times 32$  m, entered through a doorway with an elaborate cornice and a limestone-paved vestibule that led to the central colonnaded court (Fig. 21).<sup>108</sup> This was surrounded by rooms: small ones on the north and west, apparently for storage and service; a large dining room on the south; and the major reception room on the east, with a vestibule and several annexes.<sup>109</sup> This room, separated from its vestibule by an archway, rose higher than the colonnade and was lighted by glass windows. The colonnade in front of it was partially blocked with marble chancel plaques, while the north and south intercolumniations were covered by a metal grille. Together with its upper floor, the house had an area of about 1,900 m<sup>2</sup>. The floors were covered with geometric mosaics, while the walls of the main reception room bore a figural decoration of painted stucco and imitation marble.

Subsequent additions, which especially affected the courtyard, brought no fundamental change. An apse was added to the east end of the north colonnade (Fig. 22), and a monumental fountain or reservoir was built into the courtyard, blocking the west colonnade. The fine masonry of the structures indicates that they are of a prosperous period. The *opus sectile* that replaced many of the mosaics is probably contemporary. On the north side of the house, a small room was built out into the street, covering the existing drain; it had a small passage that connected the upper story with the drain. Coins found in it span the period from Justinian to 610, suggesting that the rebuildings are of the sixth century and that the house continued in use without further change until the early seventh at least. Large quantities of fish bones were also found in this drain, most of them of catfish from the local marshes. They included, however, several remains of marine fish, indicating commercial relations with the coast and the wealth of the owners who could eat imported fish.<sup>110</sup> In this period, fish was a major item in the inhabitants' diet; in subsequent periods, it seems to have vanished from their tables almost entirely.

The house may have been temporarily abandoned, then reoccupied.<sup>111</sup> At that time, parts of the colonnades and many doors were blocked, apparently dividing the house into several smaller units (Fig. 23). Further changes were more substantial: the great reception room collapsed and was walled off except for a well cut in its floor. The upper story also collapsed, and pieces from it were used to block openings. An oven was installed in the south colonnade, apparently now open, and a retaining wall was built across the street to hold back debris there. By this time, people lived in the ruins together with their animals, which included cats, dogs, chickens, goats, cattle, donkeys, horses, and camels (bones of all were found under columns that collapsed in an earthquake). Their diet, like that in the Pilaster House, was predominantly meat from sheep and goats, with less beef, pork, and chicken; the heads of the sheep and goats had all been cut in half for making stew.

<sup>108</sup> *Apamée M13*, 19–40.

<sup>109</sup> The excavators have suggested that the north suite of rooms discreetly connected to each other may have been a gynaeceum; its proximity to the main entrance, however, makes this unlikely. Women's rooms were more probably out of sight on the upper floor.

<sup>110</sup> See the discussion in *Apamée M13*, 291–303, and the table on p. 348.

<sup>111</sup> Evidence for abandonment rests on the discovery of fragments of wall decoration in the main reception room on a layer of debris up to 30 cm thick (*Apamée M13*, 36). The debris could, it seems, equally well have accumulated at a later time, after the roof of this part of the house collapsed. In general, the coins from the building (tabulated, *ibid.*, 240 f, 252) show a remarkably continuous sequence from the 6th through the early 9th century.

At this stage the house had lost all its original functions and was occupied as a series of small units by people and animals. These changes took place over a period whose major stages may be indicated by coin finds. Coins in the drain over the north street show that it was still in use until the early seventh century. A Sasanian dirham found in one of the north rooms is lone attestation (on the whole site) of the Persian occupation; it is not associated with any destruction. Coins of Heraclius of 615–626, however, portend major change, as they were found on the pavement of the main reception room under pieces of fallen wall decoration. They presumably reached Apamea during the Byzantine reoccupation and indicate that the most important room was still standing then but ruined soon after. In any case, the well installed in that room is dated by coins to about 660, and the retaining wall across the street may be contemporary.<sup>112</sup> In the mid- to late seventh century, therefore, the house was in ruins, though still occupied. The coin sequence continues through the early ninth century, the great majority of coins found in the courtyard and north wing. Occupation was restricted to this part of the house and may have ended earlier than in the neighboring Pilaster House.

Two more houses stood side by side about 100 m north of the *decumanus* in a district evidently full of such mansions, between the Console House and the grand colonnade. The House of Console Capitals is as monumental as any studied.<sup>113</sup> It occupies about 90 × 50 m, with a long peristyle of 56 × 24 m. The plan is unconventional: the main ceremonial room on the north, flanked by smaller rooms and an inner court, is entered through a narrow opening rather than being open to the peristyle. Parallels with houses in the nearby hills have suggested that this is the dwelling of a rural landowner. In any case, the main rooms were paved with fine geometric mosaics, and all show traces of various late antique rebuildings. The small court behind the reception room has a pavement of squared limestone blocks that strikingly resembles that of the sixth-century street.

At some point while the house was still functioning, a monumental cistern with a fountain behind it was installed across the south side of the court. It was carefully built of cut limestone and bands of brick. The colonnades were partially blocked with walls of neatly laid rubble, which perhaps correspond to the grilles in the porticoes of the Console House. This work appears to be contemporary with a new fine pavement of brick and limestone. No evidence for dating these or other late antique phases was discovered.

The house deteriorated in two stages. In the first stage, the building was still standing but put to new uses. Its spaces were subdivided, a well replaced the cistern, new pavements were laid, and the large basins were used for garbage, including remains of animals and fish, the vast majority of them catfish.<sup>114</sup> A coin of Constans II (655/8) found in the basin may date this period. The second stage, as elsewhere, was chaotic: poor rubble walls blocked open spaces and divided rooms; a wall was assembled from column drums to divide the court; and animals were everywhere. Troughs were set up in the peristyle, and attachments for animals were found on large blocks throughout the structure. This stage, which represents the complete ruralization of a notably urban structure, is prob-

<sup>112</sup>Coin evidence: *Apamée M13*, 36 f.

<sup>113</sup>*Apamée M13*, 107–25.

<sup>114</sup>See *Apamée M13*, 291–303. As in the case of the Console House, fish vanishes from the local diet, though here somewhat later, after the mid-7th century.

ably to be associated with coins and pottery of the eighth–tenth centuries. The people of this time seem to have reoccupied the house and destroyed all earlier remains.

Immediately adjacent on the west was the House of the Deer, of which only part has been excavated.<sup>115</sup> The house contained the usual peristyle with a large reception room opening onto it, an apsidal dining room, and smaller rooms. The house was grand but poorly built. On the other hand, it had a rich decoration of mosaics (some bearing animal figures), stucco, and fluted columns. The mosaics were dated to the sixth century. Marble *sigma*-shaped dining tables were found, one of them appropriately in the apsed room. Fragments of glass and mosaic indicate that the upper story was also well decorated.

The most remarkable find was a bronze divination table, exactly like one discovered at Pergamum and corresponding to a remarkable scene in Ammianus Marcellinus where members of the imperial court were using such an object to consult the will of the gods, with fatal results. Evidently, such superstition was still popular here in the sixth century.

The divination table was found in a layer of destruction caused by the burning of the house. Many parts collapsed, causing rubble to accumulate up to 2 m in some rooms; most of the mosaics show traces of burning. It seems likely that this reflects the Persian destruction of 573. After this, the house was abandoned: 30–60 cm of fill drifted in before partial reoccupation began. In that, the peristyle was blocked and adjacent rooms divided. The few coins discovered seem to indicate that the reoccupation was of the seventh and eighth centuries. Subsequently, the place was destroyed again and abandoned.

Evidence from the few other houses that have been partially excavated or studied is rarely detailed but shows that the development of the southern part of the city finds parallels elsewhere. The House of the Doric Peristyle, immediately north of the House of Console Capitals, had rooms around a large courtyard and a vestibule paved with basalt and limestone in a checkerboard pattern.<sup>116</sup> In a late period, the main entrance was blocked and a battery of mangers set up in a room entered from the colonnade. Many marble pieces were stored in another large room, apparently for reuse after some disaster. Here, too, the transformation seen elsewhere is clearly present in outline. Likewise, the House of the Aqueduct, in the northern part of the city east of the grand colonnade, received a series of mangers in a late occupation.<sup>117</sup>

The House of Trilobe Columns, in the middle of the city just west of the grand colonnade, also stands in a neighborhood of mansions. It was a large peristyle house of the usual kind, richly decorated with marble and mosaic. In the sixth century it was partially rebuilt, with a monumental entry, its vestibule paved in *opus sectile*, and a basin installed in one of the rooms. All this was eventually destroyed in a fire. Subsequently, apparently in the mid-seventh century, its court was reoccupied, the colonnades were blocked to create small rooms, and two wells were dug. As often, the inner rooms, probably reduced to piles of rubble, show no trace of reuse. The house was occupied into the Abbasid period.<sup>118</sup> The adjacent House of the Bilobe Columns, which stands on the grand colon-

<sup>115</sup>*Apamée M13*, 155–69.

<sup>116</sup>See the summary report in *Syria* 60 (1983), 292–94.

<sup>117</sup>See the previous note.

<sup>118</sup>The report (*Apamée M13*, 181–93) is remarkably poor in discussing chronology; the handful of coins found suggests a sequence; the pottery, some of which indicates much later (re)occupation, was not discussed.

nade, has not been published, but a small sample of coins may suggest that it was abandoned in the late sixth century.<sup>119</sup>

These houses provide some of the most important and spectacular evidence for the transformation of an ancient city, in a consistent pattern of development observable throughout the site.<sup>120</sup> They show an unambiguous transition from urban to rural life, from wealth to poverty. From their evidence alone, it is clear that the Apamea of the Umayyads and Abbasids was a completely different kind of settlement from that of Justinian.

In all cases, the houses show tremendous continuity from the time of their construction (often Roman) through the sixth century. They were grand mansions, evidently of a rich and sophisticated aristocracy, who had many dependents and for whom public functions—banquets, receptions, and the like—were an essential part of life. They lived in their spacious private domains, almost entirely closed to the outside but open within onto a colonnaded courtyard. The decoration manifests the wealth of the owners, usually in the form of mosaics or *opus sectile* on the floor, cut marble or stucco on the walls—a carpet of color throughout. By the time of Justinian, these people were living as they had for three or four hundred years.

The age of Justinian brought changes, none profound. Perhaps because of an earthquake, or in some cases from changing fashions, much rebuilding took place. In the Triclinos House, which suffered from a fire, the work can be precisely dated to 539 by the inscription of the new mosaics. Sometimes *opus sectile* replaced mosaics (House of Trilobe Columns), and often new structures were inserted: apsidal chambers—perhaps a new kind of reception room (Pilaster and Console houses)—or monumental fountains and cisterns (Console and Console Capitals houses). In all cases, the rebuildings were of the same high quality and opulence as the original construction. Where they can be dated, they belong to the sixth century, clearly a time when the owners still had the resources and desire to rebuild or transform their houses.

Three of these grand houses subsequently suffered serious damage: the Deer and Trilobe Columns houses burned, and the House of the Bilobe Columns was abandoned. Evidence from the excavations is sparse but points to the late sixth century. It is surely logical to see in this the effects of the destruction of the city by the Persians in 573. On the other hand, the Console House seems to have continued its normal existence into the early seventh century. This may suggest that the accounts of destruction are exaggerated or that the fire moved out from the main boulevard and had less effect on the periphery of the city.

In any case, the next stage, common to all these houses, is of profound transformation, the first of two steps toward abandonment. In this, large spaces are divided, colonnades blocked, wells dug, and some parts abandoned, yet the work often manifests some care. The Pilaster and Console Capitals houses show this first stage most clearly. Similar phenomena are visible in the Console House, but here there seems to have been more serious damage in an early stage. Where such work can be dated, it appears to be of the

<sup>119</sup>*Apamée M13*, 246, for a comment in the discussion of the coin finds.

<sup>120</sup>See the important synthesis of J. Balty, "Note sur l'habitat romain, byzantin et arabe d'Apamée," in *Apamée M13*, 471–506.

seventh century, usually around the middle. The evidence is clearest in the Console House, where the decoration of the main reception room collapsed (and was never repaired) after about 630, and a well was installed in the same room around 660.

These changes are momentous: an entire way of life had disappeared, yet the memory of antiquity was still alive. The most obvious explanation, and the one usually adopted, is that the owners fled the city and never returned, that is, the ancient aristocracy ceased to have a place in Apamea and thus no longer set a tone or maintained the urban amenities that had always characterized the city. Whether they managed to take their wealth with them or not, it is evident that the place they left behind was far poorer than it had been.

Historical circumstances, combined with the archaeological evidence, may enable the situation to be reconstructed. The great changes took place between the late sixth and mid-seventh centuries. The first stage was surely the destruction of the city in 573. Contemporary writers, natives of the region, unambiguously report universal devastation and depopulation. This must have left its mark on the city. When people did return, as they certainly did, they made an effort to restore or maintain their way of life. Apamea, however, could never have been more than a shadow of its former self after 573.

The next stage was probably associated with the great Persian war that began in 602 and brought the fall of Apamea in 611. This surely would have provoked the flight of those with the means to take refuge elsewhere, but there is no indication that the Persians inflicted any serious damage on the city which, after all, lay in a rich region they intended to keep as part of their empire. It would be more valuable in good condition (the raid of 573 was designed to inflict damage on an enemy state and hence is not to be compared with the conquest). On the other hand, their occupation may have represented a real turning point in the life of the city in that the aristocracy probably fled, leaving their dwellings to be occupied by others; they too may have believed that the Persians had come to stay. Unfortunately, the excavations have identified no specific evidence for the Persian period: only one coin, from the Console House, certainly represents this time.

When the forces of Heraclius returned in 630, it is possible that some of the old aristocracy came with them and perhaps once again tried to restore their houses. The Arab conquest, however, followed so soon—after only six years—that little major work can have been accomplished. Presumably the aristocracy (if there were any left) fled once again, this time never to return.

The first stage of transformation of the houses certainly indicates that a different population is at hand. The idea of large open houses, with much space for public function, is given up altogether, and much more of the surface is put to functional use. On the other hand, some parts of these houses were definitely ruined and not repaired, probably results of the fire of 573. The old style of decoration is also abandoned: wall stuccos fall off and are not replaced; new pavements of cheaper materials are laid. The aqueducts are apparently no longer functioning, for wells are dug. These changes seem to occupy the mid-seventh century, perhaps occurring as early as 630, certainly in place by 660, that is, they coincide with the Arab conquest and the decades following it.

This appears to have been a time of transformation but also restoration. Houses are reoccupied, and some work is done in a style that imitates the late antique. This suggests



that the standard set by the aristocracy had not entirely disappeared, though the resources to maintain it were no longer available. The phenomenon has a curious parallel in Asia Minor, where massive fortress walls were built over and from the ruins of ancient cities destroyed in the wars of the seventh century. In most cases, these use regularly arranged antique stones to give a kind of classical appearance, as if it were still considered necessary for the existence of a city of whatever kind. In other words, the ancient mentality had not disappeared, however changed the circumstances. This first stage, then, which still manifests a certain order, seems to belong to the time after the conquest.

Division of space has an important implication. Not only was the aristocratic appearance given up, and the whole concept of the house changed, but the population was different. Although the transformations can certainly be interpreted as reflecting impoverishment—plainly the new inhabitants were not as rich as the old—it does not mean that the population had declined. On the contrary, division of space indicates a need for rooms, surely because there were more people living in the houses. The phenomenon is universal in these houses and suggests that the population actually increased at this time. Such an increase presumably represents an influx from the countryside, whether as refugees or as part of the eternal process of natural increase, always more rapid in the country than the city. The implications of this will be considered below.

In many cases, the houses manifest a second stage of transformation in which any semblance of order is gone, and space is divided chaotically with any materials at hand. In this stage, which may have affected different houses at different times and overlapped with the previous one, the spaces, whether rooms or simply divisions in colonnades, were much smaller, life seems to have been more concentrated in the courtyard and colonnades (probably because many of the interior rooms had collapsed), and people lived together with their animals in close quarters. Where an upper floor had survived, the people probably lived there and kept their animals in the courtyard. In any case, stalls, mangers, and attachments for animals are common in the houses, cooking was done in the court, and rubbish was deposited everywhere. Such changes are visible in virtually all the houses. Ruralization was now complete: Apamea no longer preserved a trace of urban domestic life but resembled a great village, different from others only in its vast size and shabbiness.

Where this stage can be dated, it seems to begin in the eighth century, though it cannot always neatly be separated from the former stage, and in some cases there is only one stage, more like this than the first. It apparently represents life in the late Umayyad and Abbasid periods, a life that at Apamea rarely extends beyond the tenth century and often ends by the early ninth.

The evidence from the churches complements that of the houses. They show that Apamea thrived and grew in the reign of Justinian, when the Cathedral and its elaborate complex were built and the Atrium Church was lavishly reconstructed. All this work is on a much grander scale than anything observable in the houses. Yet the Atrium Church, at least, suffered as much in the Persian attack of 573 as did the houses. It eventually rose from its ruins but in a less elegant form. The greatest changes came in the seventh century, when both churches were invaded by graves. This appears to coincide with the general ruralization of the houses. At this time, the Atrium Church was blocked up. Fi-

nally, in a period that finds a close parallel in the houses, the churches were taken over by the poor and chaotic small-scale occupation which universally marks the demise of organized civic life at Apamea.

### *The Territory of Apamea*

Apamea controlled a large territory whose limits are known in the north, where it adjoined that of Antioch in the northern part of the Jebel Zawiye.<sup>121</sup> Its limits in the other directions are uncertain, but in the east the desert, in the west the steep Jebel Ansariye, and in the south the territory of Larissa would provide suitable boundaries. It would in any case have included much of the Orontes Valley and surrounding plains. This discussion treats only the area immediately adjacent to the city as well as the Jebel Zawiye. The basalt plains and hills to the east will be considered below with the territory of Epiphania, as they merge imperceptibly into it, whatever its exact limits may have been.<sup>122</sup>

Some of the most fertile territory of the city was in the Orontes Valley, where no remains have survived. The excavations of Apamea, however, have produced some extremely suggestive information about the environment of this region by studying the remains of animals. The remains of fish show a great increase in the proportion of catfish by the mid-seventh century.<sup>123</sup> In modern times, when the central Orontes became a great marshy lake, people would move to the marshes, catch the catfish, salt them, and ship them over a large area. It would appear that the increase in catfish represents extension of the marshes and thus environmental degradation, either from environmental change or political reasons, that is, adequate drainage was no longer being maintained. Certainly, medieval Arab travelers, beginning in the late ninth century, portray Apamea as situated on a lake, sometimes described as a series of lagoons.<sup>124</sup> This situation may have developed in the period of transition.

Similarly, the increase in the consumption of chickens, sheep, and goats while fewer pigs and cattle were being eaten, a phenomenon that becomes notable after the mid-seventh century, may be taken to indicate environmental deterioration, with shrinking forests and less agriculture, partly perhaps because of the increase of the marshes. Pigs and cattle both appear to have been slaughtered very young, perhaps another sign of scarcity of pasture. Finally, the increasing predominance of goats over sheep may also indicate increasing poverty.<sup>125</sup> Certainly, increasing poverty would correspond with the changing nature of the remains, while the disorganization they imply would well suit the notion of environmental degradation.

The steep face of a range known as the Jebel Shahshabu stands immediately above the east side of the Orontes Valley. Behind it, on the northeast of Apamea, is a small level plain that gradually rises toward the limestone hills. This plain, which has been surveyed, contains the remains of an anonymous ecclesiastical site about 2 km from Apamea, while the hills offer a similar site at Huarte. The former, called by the surveyors Site 13, was

<sup>121</sup> See the map in Tchalenko, *Villages*, III, 57.

<sup>122</sup> The highway from Hama to Aleppo is taken here as an arbitrary dividing line, as used by regional surveys. Lands east of the highway are discussed below, with Epiphania.

<sup>123</sup> *Apamée M13*, 291–303.

<sup>124</sup> See the citations in Le Strange, *Palestine*, 384.

<sup>125</sup> See the discussion and tables in *Apamée M13*, 305–60.

formerly identified with the well-known monastery of Nikertai.<sup>126</sup> These are the only sites of the entire region that have been the subject of systematic surveying and excavation.

Site 13 consists of a basilical church with a large atrium and an adjacent complex of buildings that includes an olive press. Graves within the church suggest that the buildings formed a monastery. The church was constructed of well-arranged limestone blocks and had a limestone pavement. It was evidently an unpretentious structure with a mosaic decoration that has left few traces. The church was destroyed in the sixth century (no date has been established), then rebuilt using spoils from the original structure, and reoccupied through the late seventh century. A second destruction followed, then a partial reoccupation at a time when a good deal of earth had accumulated on the ruins. In this final stage the olive press was no longer used, but poor walls, evidently of habitation, filled its interior. This final occupation has been dated by a coin to the early ninth century.

This small site might be taken as an example of a development that finds its parallels in Apamea. The first destruction could have been the work of the Persians of 573, with the reconstruction following soon after. The final destruction has no dated counterpart at Apamea but suits the stage between the organized and chaotic late levels, while the final occupation corresponds to that seemingly disorganized period in the city.

Such information alone would be of value, but the site offers much more, in fact a spectacular and unexpected amount of wealth. A hoard of 534 Byzantine gold coins (all but 18 were *solidi*) was found carefully hidden in the wall of one of the rooms north of the church. It contains a continuous sequence of coins from Maurice (582–602) through Constantine IV (668–685). The greatest number (285) are of Heraclius; the latest is datable to 674–681. Judging by their state of preservation, the coins were selected from those in circulation near the time of their deposit. They appear to represent the capital of the local community, which evidently possessed more wealth than could be imagined from the remains. The coins suggest that the region adjacent to Apamea maintained its prosperity at least through the late seventh century.

North of this site, Huarte stands in limestone hills at the foot of the Jebel Zawiye, 12 km from Apamea, next to the route from the plain to the mountain. It was the site of two basilicas and a baptistery, the latter rebuilt in the early sixth century.<sup>127</sup> Subsequently, the site was systematically abandoned; the inhabitants emptied the buildings (not even any coins were found), which were left to deteriorate. As the church shows little sign of use, it may have been abandoned in the late sixth or early seventh century, perhaps when the inhabitants fled from one of the invasions. Eventually the roof collapsed, a few squatters arrived, pillaged the church, and desecrated the graves. The whole complex was finally destroyed in an earthquake, perhaps in the mid-ninth century. Although no substantial chronology is available—it is not possible to tell when or why the place was deserted—this site confirms the picture of transformation and abandonment visible at “Nikertai.”

<sup>126</sup>For Site 13, see M.-T. and P. Canivet, “Sites chrétiens d’Apamène,” *Syria* 48 (1971), 299–314, and the summary of P. and M.-T. Canivet, *Huarte* (Paris, 1987), 69–83. The actual location of Nikertai, near Ma’aret al-Nu‘man and some 30 km northeast of Apamea, was determined by J.-P. Fourdrin, “Note sur la localisation de Nikertai,” *REB* 51 (1993), 177–83. For the hoard of gold coins found here, see C. Morrisson, “Le trésor byzantin de Nikertai,” *RBN* 118 (1972), 29–91.

<sup>127</sup>See Canivet and Canivet, *Huarte*, 28–45 (geography) and 86–91, 317 (remains).

The territory of Apamea included most of the Jebel Zawiye, the rugged massif that stretches northeast of the city. This is the steepest of the hill regions, rising sharply from the Orontes Valley to heights of more than 1,000 m, then sloping gradually to the steppe in the east. Although this district is undulating and cut by wadis, it is more favorable to cultivation than the hills to the north. It has more soil and at present supports a larger population, with cultivated fields, pastures, and orchards. It is the most prosperous part of the whole hill country.<sup>128</sup>

Conditions in late antiquity were similar. The remains show clearly that the Jebel Zawiye had larger villages, bigger houses, and more land per village than elsewhere. Configuration of the fields and general scarcity of mangers in the houses indicate that livestock raising was of minor importance and that local crops were varied, with wheat, grapes, olives, and fruit trees predominating. The large presses found at a few sites have suggested that this area orientated itself to a market economy at a relatively early date and that its success there was a major factor in the evident prosperity.<sup>129</sup>

Like the rest of the hill country, the Jebel Zawiye experienced considerable growth in late antiquity. In 550 the number of rooms in the village houses was four times what it had been in 350, and the amount of land per room had declined from 13 to 4 ha. This meant that the district was densely populated, though not so much as the northern hills. It would thus have been able to maintain a higher level of prosperity. It seems to have reached its peak of development rather earlier than the other districts, though inscriptions show that building activity continued through the sixth century. Clear evidence for later periods is lacking because no sites have yet been excavated, but the remains have suggested that the decline of population everywhere observed may have affected this district sooner than others.<sup>130</sup> Although there are no excavated villages, two that have been surveyed may serve for the rest and indicate the kind of information available here.

The largest site, Kapropera, stands on the wadi that separates the two parts of the *jebel*, at the intersections of roads that lead across the hills.<sup>131</sup> It was surrounded by smaller villages and at least four monasteries. With its 850 rooms, it was twice the size of the next largest village and five times as populated as Dehes in the territory of Antioch. Its large extent (the remains stretch over an area of  $3 \times 2$  km) suggests that it was a town or regional center, but the remains, despite their size and variety, are fundamentally the same as those of other villages. The site contains one large church and four smaller ones, and numerous houses with many rooms each. Most remarkable is a large underground olive press whose size has suggested production for an external market. Although there are few inscriptions to provide chronology for its development, the northern part of the village appears to have been built up in the sixth century, while an inscription from one of the surrounding monasteries indicates that the local road was paved in 563, toward the end of the reign of Justinian.<sup>132</sup>

Kapropera preserves its name in the modern al-Bara, a sure indication of continued

<sup>128</sup>For the geography, see Butler IIB.3, 105–11, and Tchalenko, *Villages*, III, 59 f.

<sup>129</sup>See Tate, *Campagnes*, 251 f, 264, 307, and *passim*.

<sup>130</sup>Tate, *Campagnes*, 342.

<sup>131</sup>See Tchalenko, *Villages*, III, 41 f, 87–90, and pls. cxxxvii–cxxxix with text; Tate, *Campagnes*, index, s.v.

<sup>132</sup>Tchalenko, *Villages*, III, 33.

occupation. In fact, medieval sources reflect its later importance, but evidence for the intervening period is elusive. *Mihrabs* added to the village churches cannot be dated, but the local small mosques are all of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Only a graffito that appears to bear the date 140 A.H. (758, i.e., early in the Abbasid period) suggests that occupation continued here, but in what form cannot be determined.<sup>133</sup>

Another village of great interest is Serjilla, about 5 km southeast of Kapropera.<sup>134</sup> It originally consisted of about thirty houses, some with as many as sixteen rooms. In the center was a large basilical church with outbuildings, and north of it, overlooking a wadi, a public bath, a highly unusual structure in these hills.<sup>135</sup> Its mosaic inscription indicates that it was built by a local notable in 473. Next to it is an ambiguous small building that may have served a public purpose, also a rarity in villages that consist almost exclusively of houses and churches.<sup>136</sup>

The local church appears to have been enlarged in the sixth century. One of its outbuildings, a three-aisled structure south of the main church, has a *mihrab* built into its south wall.<sup>137</sup> The construction suggests that it was added at a time when the rest of the complex was in disrepair. Unfortunately, no evidence for dating it has been published.

Because of the lack of excavation, the territory of Apamea presents a far less developed image than the city. Where specific information is available, though, it tends to correspond with what the larger urban excavations have revealed. In the area immediately adjacent to Apamea, the physical environment of the Orontes Valley seems to have deteriorated in the mid-seventh century, the apparent time of ruralization of the city. The small excavation of "Nikertai" shows a development like that of Apamea, with destruction in the sixth century, reoccupation on a smaller scale, then a second destruction followed by a poor occupation. It offers, however, evidence for surprising wealth in the hoard of gold Byzantine coins buried around 680 and shows that the Umayyad period, here at least, had centers of real prosperity. The small site of Huarte, with its destruction in the late sixth or early seventh century and squatter occupation afterward, can easily fit into the general picture.

The Jebel Zawiye, with its large villages and fields, conforms to the image of the wealthy late antique metropolis, and it is not hard to image the owners of the urban villas having their estates here. Unfortunately, this region tells far less of the period of transition: only the bare fact of later Muslim occupation and probably continuity through the centuries following the conquest can be established. The territory of Apamea, therefore, provides a highly valuable supplement to late antiquity, but, except for the district closest to the city, is less satisfactory for the Islamic period.

<sup>133</sup>H. C. Butler, *Publications of an American Archaeological Expedition to Syria* (New York, 1903–30), IV, 193 f, no. 17.

<sup>134</sup>Surveyed by Butler IIB.3, 113–33.

<sup>135</sup>Butler, *American Expedition*, II, 288–93. See also G. Charpentier, "Les bains de Serdjilla," *Syria* 71 (1994), 113–42, and for the broader context, idem, "Les petits bains protobyzantins de la Syrie du Nord," *Topoi* 5 (1995), 219–47.

<sup>136</sup>See Tate, *Campagnes*, 73, who accepts this as a possible *andron*, a term whose definition he questions on the same page.

<sup>137</sup>Butler, *American Expedition*, III, 195.

## EPIPHANIA/HAMA

*The City*

Epiphania, which stands on the Orontes some 50 km southeast of Apamea, was never of much consequence in antiquity. It is of interest here, however, as the center of a region that contains extensive remains of late antiquity and as an example of a place that gained importance under the Arabs, who called it by its more ancient name, Hama. The city has been partially excavated, and the adjacent region, which adjoins the territory of Apamea, has been thoroughly explored.<sup>138</sup> Information from this district provides a valuable supplement to that from the better-known cities to the north.

Except for its role as a road station and bishopric in the diocese of Apamea, the history of late antique Epiphania is almost totally obscure. It did, however, have the curious distinction of being the home of two late-sixth-century historians, John of Epiphania, whose fragmentary history covered the period 572 to 592, and his relative, the much more important Evagrius, author of the *Ecclesiastical History* written in Antioch in 594. Their existence at least suggests an important local tradition of education. The city was perhaps fortified by Justinian; it fell to the Arabs in 636.

The Umayyads included Hama in the *jund* of Homs (ancient Emesa, about 50 km south), under whose administration it remained. It was never a mint during the period. The earliest description, from 884, portrays it as a castle with stone walls containing buildings of stone.<sup>139</sup> The main market lay below the castle hill, with a fort of its own, many shops, bazaars, and houses of merchants. The Orontes, flowing through the town, turned the great waterwheels that are still a characteristic feature of the local landscape. At that time, it was evidently a place of some prosperity—far more so than Apamea—but not a great city, for the source calls it a village.

The archaeological evidence is poor but suggestive.<sup>140</sup> The excavations concentrated on the acropolis hill, a broad, round tell covered in Roman and late antique times by large houses. Most of the remains, however, were so disturbed by later constructions and intrusions that a complete picture could not be drawn. The most important building was the House of Mosaics, a villa whose main wing of seven rooms all paved with mosaics occupied 30 × 20 m. This building remained in use through the periods studied here. Its mosaics were defaced at some point: the central figures were all removed and only the margins and geometric panels allowed to subsist. Such activity is most probably to be attributed to the widespread iconoclasm of Yazid II (720–724). The other houses, too poorly preserved to describe, also appear to have been in continuous use. The hill was surrounded by a fortification wall that may have been built by Justinian; it was in any

<sup>138</sup>It is not possible to speak of the territory of Epiphania because its extent is unknown. It presumably included the Jebel 'Ala immediately to the east, but some of the adjacent lands presumably belonged to Larissa, on the Orontes between Apamea and Epiphania. Virtually nothing is known about that city: see the article "Sizara" (its ancient name, preserved in the modern Shayzar) by E. Honigmann in *RE*, IIIA, 418 f (1927).

<sup>139</sup>Ahmad ibn at-Tāyib, quoted by Yakut in Le Strange, *Palestine*, 359.

<sup>140</sup>For what follows, see G. Ploug, *Hama: Fouilles et recherches, 1931–1938*, III/1: *The Graeco-Roman Town* (Copenhagen, 1985), 15 (general problems), 86–96, 115–21 (House of Mosaics), 121–28, 171–84 (mosaics), all reported in great detail.



case rebuilt later and continued in use.<sup>141</sup> Such evidence, though fragmentary, indicates a development very different from that of Antioch and especially Apamea. No ruralization is evident here; city life in large and comfortable houses apparently continued without interruption.

The lower town, also, seems to have prospered. Its most important structure, the cathedral, survived but underwent a significant transformation. Inscriptions show that it was dedicated to the Virgin, that it had the right of asylum, and that it was rebuilt in 595. This city, which had not undergone the calamities of Antioch and Apamea, was evidently prosperous enough at such a late date to undertake major construction.<sup>142</sup> Later, either immediately after the conquest or—perhaps more probably—under the Umayyads, it was converted into the great mosque of the city (or, alternatively, the material of the church was reused for building the mosque).<sup>143</sup> In any case, Hama, unlike the cities so far considered, had a large mosque by the eighth century, a fact that has important implications for the transformation from a Christian to a Muslim city. The mosque was restored by al-Mahdi (775–780), a work paid by the taxes of Homs.<sup>144</sup>

The only other buildings mentioned in the lower town have both vanished: the winter baths, paid for by a certain Elias who took pity on the poor of the city, apparently in the sixth century, and the fort al-Mansuriyya, mentioned by Ahmad ibn al-Tayyib as standing next to the market.<sup>145</sup> Its name indicates a construction of the caliph al-Mansur (754–775) and reflects, like the description above, the continuing significance of Hama.<sup>146</sup>

The coins provide a useful, though limited, supplement to the archaeological evidence. The numbers identified are small but indicate continuity. There were 8 of Justinian, 14 through Focas, and 19 of Heraclius (from 612 to 636, evidently showing activity during the reconquest). The 35 coins of Constans II represent the early years of Arab rule, while the 27 Umayyad and 41 Abbasid pieces, too poorly preserved to identify

<sup>141</sup>Its remains were found in the excavations; see *Hama*, III/1, 121–28. Abu'l Fida, a local historian of great learning who wrote in the 13th century, attributes the wall to "Istinus" (text in P. J. Riis et al., *Hama: Fouilles et recherches, 1931–1938*, IV/2: *Les verreries et poteries médiévales* [Copenhagen, 1957], 305); this might mean Justinian, but could as well be emended to read "Constantine" (*Hama*, III/1, 117).

<sup>142</sup>See *IGLSyr* 2000–2002, with commentary and references. The dated inscriptions occur on arches on the west face of the mosque; they state that these stones were placed in 595. They probably refer to a reconstruction but could indicate (as has sometimes been supposed) that the church was actually built at that time.

<sup>143</sup>Although the 13th-century historian Abu'l Fida (in *Hama*, IV/2, 302) reports that the church became a mosque immediately after the conquest, there is considerable debate about its date and construction. P. J. Riis, "Note on the Early Christian Basilica in Hama," *Berytus* 4 (1937), 116–20, supposed that the mosque was inserted into the preexisting church, with appropriate modifications, a position ardently espoused by K. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1969), I, 17–21, against the theory of J. Sauvaget, *La mosquée omeyyade de Médine* (Paris, 1947), who saw the mosque as an entirely Umayyad construction, reusing the stones of the church. Since the building was destroyed in 1983, conclusions can no longer be drawn, but the excellent photographs of Creswell seem to show that the lower walls of the mosque are in situ and thus incorporate those of the church. This does not, of course, preclude an extensive Umayyad reconstruction.

<sup>144</sup>See the passage of Abu'l Fida in the previous note.

<sup>145</sup>Bath: *IGLSyr* 1999; fort: see above, note 139.

<sup>146</sup>I have omitted discussion of the 5th-century Christian basilica discovered in the lower town southwest of the acropolis. It was eventually abandoned and a house of several rooms, with a large oven, built over its ruins, on a meter of debris. As these remains have not been dated, they cannot be used here; see the note in *Syria* 62 (1965), 139.

closely, indicate continuity.<sup>147</sup> The pottery is less useful: wares of the sixth and seventh centuries were not reported, but Samarra pottery of the late ninth shows the same continuity and an orientation toward Iraq.<sup>148</sup>

### *The District*

The region considered here extends from the vicinity of Hama to Ma'aret al-Nu'man, about 55 km north, at the eastern edge of the Jebel Zawiye, and is about 40 km wide. The southern part presumably formed the territory of Epiphania; the association of the rest is unknown, but as the region forms a whole that has been well explored and shares many common characteristics, it is convenient to treat it here. The southern section is a plateau, while the rest consists of rolling country with settled agriculture, bounded on the west by the limestone hills and the Orontes and trailing off into the desert on the east. The desert regions, which have their own ecology and social structure, are not treated here.<sup>149</sup> The rest, however, was densely occupied by villages—more than two hundred sites have been explored—with remains of much interest for the periods under discussion.<sup>150</sup>

The district closest to Hama is the plateau of al-'Ala, which rises just east of the city and comprises a roughly triangular district some 15 km east-west by 10 km north-south.<sup>151</sup> This forms the southern outrider of a rolling basalt country that stretches north about 70 km to the Jebel Hass. The plateau rises steeply on most sides, but slopes more gradually toward the desert in the east. The top of the plateau, which is relatively flat and fertile, now contains numerous villages, usually not much more than 2 km apart, almost inevitably built on ancient sites. Because of continuous occupation and poor construction of basalt set in soft mortar, standing remains are few, but adequate to indicate a considerable density of occupation—comparable to the limestone hills of the north—and a variety of buildings. Because the buildings tended to employ huge stone lintels, many of them inscribed, the region has proved rich in epigraphical data that enable its development to be perceived.

The architecture of this region is consistent: each village had numerous houses, some quite large and all comparable in scale to those of the limestone district, and churches, always on the basilical plan. It contains one monastery. Almost every village had a tower for lookout and defense. These towers provide the most obvious contrast with the lime-

<sup>147</sup>See A. Papanicolaou-Christensen et al., *Hama: Fouilles et recherches, 1931–1938*, III/3: *The Graeco-Roman Objects of Clay, the Coins and the Acropolis* (Copenhagen, 1986), 62 f (Byzantine), and G. Ploug et al., *Hama: Fouilles et recherches, 1931–1938*, IV/3: *Les petits objets médiévaux sauf les verreries et poteries* (Copenhagen, 1969), 142–64 (Islamic). Of the 35 coins of Constans II, 29 are of a type struck in 641–648; there was also one coin of Constantine IV, struck in Sicily 670/680, the latest Byzantine coin reported in the whole region.

<sup>148</sup>*Hama*, IV/2, 127 f.

<sup>149</sup>I have therefore omitted discussion of the major site of al-Anderin, the city of Androna, for which see Butler IIB.2, 47–63.

<sup>150</sup>These districts were surveyed in detail in 1904–5 by the Princeton expedition of H. C. Butler, which concentrated on the north and south, and in the 1930s by Jean Lassus, who made a thorough study of the remains on 192 sites (a few of them already studied by Butler) in the center: *Inventaire archéologique de la région au nord-est de Hama* (Beirut, 1935). As far as possible, I have treated the southern plateau separately, since it can be associated with Hama and offers some distinctive characteristics.

<sup>151</sup>This district was surveyed by the Butler expedition (IIB.1), which then followed the edge of the desert (a region not studied here), to return into the northern part of the hill district, discussed below.

stone hills. As this district was more open to the east, it was vulnerable to raids from the desert. Inscriptions on the towers, therefore, make frequent reference to defense and protection. Most of them date to the sixth century, as do those of all the churches. The towers are normally single structures in or adjacent to the village. One village, however, has an actual fortress, a rectangular citadel with square corner towers, of a kind more commonly found in the country to the north.<sup>152</sup>

The largest village, it-Tuba at the northern edge of the plateau, contains a church of 582, a tower, and several houses of two main plans.<sup>153</sup> The smaller are simple structures of two stories, with columns in front facing an enclosed and paved court with a well leading to a cistern in the middle. Mangers show that the ground floor was reserved for animals, while the occupants lived upstairs. They resemble the houses of the limestone district. The larger houses have more rooms, or more than one wing, similarly arranged around a court. Their ground-floor rooms had narrow slits instead of windows and were probably used for livestock. They are of a larger and more complex plan than those of the north. Houses in other villages, when they can be described, usually follow these plans. The monastery, at Nawa in the eastern part of the region, consisted of a basilical church with rooms around a large adjacent court, and a tower.<sup>154</sup> The church was built in 598, as was that of the neighboring village, which contained houses of the normal kind built around three or four sides of a court. Here, as elsewhere, monastic architecture hardly differed from domestic.

The inscriptions reveal the most surprising aspects of this district: its late development and continued prosperity.<sup>155</sup> Most of the inscriptions date from the sixth century and indicate construction of all kinds, whether ecclesiastical, domestic, or defensive. In fact, as noted above, all the churches and towers that can be dated are of the sixth century. There are very few earlier inscriptions of any kind. Most impressive is the growth that seems to have taken place in a period when other regions were stagnant. Of the fifty dated inscriptions, eleven are of the reign of Justinian (a prosperous time throughout the region), but twenty—fully half of the total—are from the subsequent forty years until 605, the date of the last. The inscriptions of the later years do not indicate any change in activity or occupation: they are not confined to defensive works or churches, but appear to reflect equally domestic, ecclesiastical, and military activity.<sup>156</sup>

The later history of this district is completely unknown. No identified remains or inscriptions of either the Umayyad or Abbasid period have been reported, but there is no reason to suppose that it was abandoned. People could have gone on living in the same houses, villages, and conditions without leaving any distinctive trace. It is clear, however, that they did not construct major buildings or anything that can be dated later

<sup>152</sup>This is at Umm Harteyn, discussed by Lassus, *Inventaire*, 210 ff. A reused inscription of 561 mentioning a *kastron* may indicate that another fort stood at Kunbus: published by W. K. Prentice in Butler IIIB.1, nos. 846, 865. The fortresses in general are considered below.

<sup>153</sup>Butler IIB.1, 19–22.

<sup>154</sup>*Ibid.*, 13–16.

<sup>155</sup>I have tabulated the inscriptions (which are not listed separately in the publications) below in the Appendix.

<sup>156</sup>Strictly speaking, the inscribed lintels could as well come from churches as houses. Those that lack specific ecclesiastical content, however, are probably from houses, which in this region employed disproportionately large lintels.

than 605. As in the better-known limestone hills, the burst of activity in the sixth century seems to have been followed by a stagnation that is difficult now to apprehend.

The ill-defined rolling country to the north offers similar characteristics, but with some notable differences. It contains an equally dense network of villages built of basalt and rarely well preserved. Most have succumbed to the effects of poor construction as well as later settlement, but in this region in the early twentieth century many sites were deserted, occupied only by the Bedouin whom the travelers frequently have occasion to mention. The geography of the area makes it more suitable for nomadism than the areas already considered, a factor that certainly would have affected its development.

The villages normally had numerous houses of the types found on the plateau and churches, usually of a basilical plan. In a few places, though, the architecture is more varied and sophisticated. The district also contains a few larger sites, one of which may even have been a city. The major differences between this and the A'la concern its earlier development, the larger number of defensive works, the information provided by the inscriptions, and the evidence for continuity under the Muslims.

Although the vast majority of the sites were villages, one place stands out by its size and buildings. Kerratin, the ancient Tarutia, about 20 km east of Ma'aret al-Nu'man in the northeast corner of this district, covers an area of almost 3 km<sup>2</sup>. Unlike most of the local sites, it appears to have been a market town where merchants and peasants of the region exchanged their goods.<sup>157</sup> Most of its buildings are houses, often quite large, crowded together on narrow passages. Many of them have elaborate entrances, such as might be found in a city, but only narrow slits in their walls, probably indicating that the ground floor was reserved for livestock, as in a village. The major monument is a church of 60 × 26 m, the largest in the entire region. It was a basilica built in 505, with a narthex and atrium that contained a residence, evidently for the clergy. Inscriptions from the site are almost entirely from the fifth and early sixth centuries; the latest is of 539. The site includes a guardhouse and a tower, built in 510 by an imperial official, John, who proclaimed in verse that he had made the country secure.<sup>158</sup>

This church suffered a peculiar fate. It was eventually transformed into a fortress: its walls were all buttressed, towers were added to the sides, its narthex was blocked, and cross walls were built in the interior. The style of the fort resembles that of others in the district and thus raises a problem: was the church sacrificed to the needs of defense already in the sixth century, implying a major increase in insecurity, or was the work done by the Muslims? If the latter, they seem to have felt the need to fortify the country at a time when the interests of local Christians could be sacrificed or perhaps when the site had been abandoned. Without dating, such questions may be raised but not answered.

As in the plateau, defensive towers are common through the region, though apparently not associated with every settlement. In addition, there are several real fortresses, some of them simple large enclosures, others citadels, usually square with square corner towers, above the settlements.<sup>159</sup> Although the towers were built throughout the period,

<sup>157</sup> See the comments of Gatier, "Villages" (as above, note 32), 35.

<sup>158</sup> Butler IIB.2, 71–93; inscriptions: Butler IIIB.2, nos. 970–1002; John: 992–993.

<sup>159</sup> Enclosures: Qasr Shteyb (Lassus, *Inventaire*, 115–18) and apparently Ma'an and Qasr al-Mharram (discussed below); citadels: Abu Habbe (*ibid.*, 47–51), Umm al-Halahil (*ibid.*, 57–78), and Umm Harteyn (above,

the forts appear to be concentrated in two decades, 556–577, evidently a time of increased insecurity or reorganization of the defensive system.<sup>160</sup>

Inscriptions allow the nature and, in one case, the development of these forts to be understood. The fort at Umm al-Halahil in the north is called a *xeneon*, that is, it was a barracks for troops passing through the area. Although this is not a frontier district, it borders on the vast arid region of Chalcis, where the defenses of the frontier were organized.<sup>161</sup>

The fort at Ma'an, in the eastern part, was built in 541 by two imperial officials, a *comes* and an *asecretis*, and proclaims Justinian who "saved all the cities," an optimistic if not accurate description of a period that saw the destruction of the greatest of all of them, Antioch, but surely referring to substantial works of defense necessitated by that disaster. The fort of Qasr al-Mharram, in the center of the district, consisted originally of three separate towers built in 551. Later, this defense was evidently felt to be inadequate, and in 574 they were joined by walls and made into a single large fortress.<sup>162</sup> All these works, towers and forts alike, attest to the growing insecurity of a relatively easily accessible district open to attack from the east.

While most of the architecture is typical of villages, a few places in the northern part of the district offer a surprising variation. The village of Fa'lul, for example, has a building that may be a bath, as well as a church of the Archangels, built in 527, that has a curious circular nave with a gallery appended to its basilical plan; it apparently had a dome in brick. Mi'rayeh, about 12 km east, next to the town of Tarutia, likewise has a church of an octagonal plan.<sup>163</sup> No explanation of these variations has been offered.

Inscriptions, in addition to those already discussed, illustrate the role of both military and civil officials, in contrast to the inscriptions of the plateau that mostly name individuals or the church. A tower in Tell Hazne in the north was built in 563 by a *periodeutes*; another inscription in the same village names a cleruch and *primiskrinarios*. A certain Macedonius, whose title is missing, and his notary John were responsible for the fort at Abu Habbe.<sup>164</sup>

The inscriptions show a much more even chronological spread than those of the A'la. More than half of them are of the fifth and the early sixth century, with only a moderate number from the reign of Justinian, and more continuing through 602, the date of the last.<sup>165</sup> This area, then, continued to flourish through the sixth century but had already been well established much earlier. There is no later epigraphic evidence.

---

note 152). Because of poor preservation of the remains, it is not certain that the two types of fortress are to be distinguished.

<sup>160</sup> See the general remarks of Butler IIIA, i–ii.

<sup>161</sup> For this fort in the context of what may have been a regional defensive system, see W. Liebeschuetz, "The Defences of Syria in the Sixth Century," *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms*, II (= *Bonner Jahrbücher*, Beiheft 38 [1977]), 492 f.

<sup>162</sup> Lassus, *Inventaire*, 143–50. Only one of the towers is actually dated, but the others appear to be contemporary, and in any case were all joined by the later walls.

<sup>163</sup> Fa'lul: Butler IIB.2, 95–100; Mi'rayeh: *ibid.*, 69 f.

<sup>164</sup> Tell Hazne: Lassus, *Inventaire*, 28–31; Abu Habbe: *ibid.*, 47–57.

<sup>165</sup> See the list in Lassus, *Inventaire*, 230 f, to which I have added inscriptions from the northern district, published by Butler, to arrive at the following distribution: 4th century: 2; 400–449: 12; 450–499: 13; 500–526: 22; 527–565: 8; 566–602: 15. When those of Kerratin are added (see below), the importance of the 5th century becomes even more pronounced.

Although the Muslims have left no inscriptions, traces of their occupation survive. They include several small mosques, usually built into or over late antique ruins, a large rectangular building that employs spoils, and a structure that appears to be a station on the road from Hama to Ma'aret al-Nu'man.<sup>166</sup> Unfortunately, as none of them can be dated, they provide no clear evidence for the transformation of the region. More intriguing, and possibly to be associated with a Muslim period, is the fate of the great church of Kerratin, discussed above. That site was certainly occupied in a Muslim period, as it contains a house that was turned into a mosque by installing a *mihrab* into its south wall; the tower added to its courtyard apparently functioned as a minaret.<sup>167</sup>

The only Islamic site of any consequence lies at the northern extremity of this district, adjacent to the limestone hills northeast of Apamea. Ma'aret al-Nu'man, the ancient Arra, has a long history that continues into modern times. Although it appears to have been of little distinction in late antiquity, it played a role in early Islamic history, when it was noted as the center of a rich agricultural district that produced grain, olives, and grapes. It also prospered from its location on an important route from Damascus and Hama to northern Syria. Sources record that it was conquered by the Arabs in 637 and took its name from Nu'man ibn Bashir, a companion of the Prophet, who died in 684; that the caliph Umar II died near it in 720; and that in 822 Abdallah ibn Tahir, the governor of the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun, put down a major revolt there and destroyed the town's fortifications.<sup>168</sup>

According to al-Baladhuri, Ma'aret al-Nu'man was famed for its palaces. This probably indicates that it had large houses of the type found in a few of the sites of this district. Its great mosque was converted from a church, perhaps soon after the conquest, and its round citadel and town walls may go back to an early period; it was, in any case, fortified in 822. Because the site has not been studied, no specific information is available about its development, but there is no doubt that it was, after Hama, the most important town of the region, apparently a site of Muslim settlement.

Hama shows a notably different development from its greater neighbors, Antioch and Apamea. Unlike them, it seems to have undergone no catastrophe in the sixth century but to have flourished until the eve of the Arab conquest, and then to manifest a remarkable degree of continuity. The evidence of the houses on the acropolis, however fragmentary, is unambiguous: urban life, as represented by luxurious dwellings, continued without a break through the period of transition.

The lower town manifests a further striking difference—a substantial Muslim presence. Mosques are virtually absent from the sites so far considered, but that of Hama is large, placed in a dominating central location, and represents conversion or replacement of the cathedral. Other structures and texts show an unbroken development well past the period treated here. Hama, then, suggests that desolation was hardly universal in the Orontes Valley and that the Muslims took advantage of a flourishing site to establish themselves in a substantial and unambiguous way.

The countryside, on the other hand, bears a close resemblance to the limestone hills.

<sup>166</sup> Mosques: Butler IIB.2, 16, 67 f, and Lassus, *Inventaire*, 9, 83, 115–18; building: Lassus, *ibid.*, 14; road station(?): Lassus, *ibid.*, 185.

<sup>167</sup> Butler IIB.2, 77.

<sup>168</sup> For this and the following information, see the comprehensive article of N. Eliséef in *EP* (1984).



Allowing for differences in rates of survival (a result of the lower quality of masonry used here), it appears to have been as densely populated as the areas further north and to have prospered through late antiquity. Construction of all kinds is attested until the beginning of the seventh century. Unlike the northern countryside, where activity declined in the mid-sixth century, the immediate area of Hama seems to have flourished then and until the Persian invasion. Thereafter the problems are those of the north: lack of inscriptions invites a superficial conclusion of widespread abandonment, but in fact there is no reason to suppose that the villages did not continue to be occupied through the Umayyad period if not later.

Like the north, this countryside was almost exclusively Christian. Muslim remains of the period are rare, though with suggestive exceptions. The cathedral of Kerratin was certainly no longer in use as a church, and the town has Islamic buildings. Ma'aret al-Nu'man stands out as one place that actually grew after the conquest, evidently because of changing patterns of trade. It would appear, like Hama, to have been a major site of Muslim settlement, while most of the surrounding country continued the life it had long known.

Here, as in the north, it seems that the Arabs found a densely populated countryside to which they brought few changes. Without excavation or detailed surveys, however, it is impossible to follow its fate and determine whether the major settlements continued to exist as centers of a network of villages or whether the villages were largely deserted in the eighth century, as so often appears elsewhere.

#### BOSTRA

Bostra was a substantial Roman city, capital of the province of Arabia, seat of a legion, and center of a network of roads that radiated in all directions (Fig. D).<sup>169</sup> It also controlled an exceptionally large territory. Powerful walls of the third century enclosed an urban area of about 1,000 × 600 m. The main public and administrative buildings stood on broad colonnaded streets, the most important running in a straight line between the east and west gates, with others intersecting it, rarely at right angles. The walls led to the vast legionary camp on the north edge of the city and left the hippodrome and amphitheater outside their circuit in the south.<sup>170</sup> A massive theater and a large reservoir dominated the southern district, while similar reservoirs lay in the eastern and western parts of the site, reflecting the arid nature of this region close to the edge of the great Syrian desert. Although written sources are rare, inscriptions and remains, some excavated, provide the basis for reconstructing the history.

<sup>169</sup>For the site, see the general description of Butler IIA.4, 215–17; and for its history, M. Sartre, *Bostra des origines à l'Islam* (Paris, 1985), esp. 88–152. My sincere thanks to François Villeneuve, who read this section with great care and made many valuable suggestions. I am also grateful to Bert de Vries for his comments about Umm al-Jimal.

<sup>170</sup>For the location of the camp, see R. Brulet, "Estampilles de la IIIe légion Cyrénaïque à Bostra," *Berytus* 32 (1984), 175–80. Existence of the camp is attested by undated brick stamps; its fate in late antiquity has not been determined. The same is true of the hippodrome (Humphrey, *Roman Circuses* [above, note 15], 492–95) and the amphitheater (R. al-Moughdad et al., "Un amphithéâtre à Bostra?" *Syria* 67 [1990], 201–4). The hippodrome is under excavation by the Syrian Department of Antiquities, but the results have not yet appeared.

Bostra passed most of late antiquity, its most flourishing time, in peace. Written sources rarely have occasion to mention it until the end of the period. In 581, the Ghasanids, long allies of the empire settled in the region, rose in revolt after the treacherous capture of their chief. They besieged Bostra, defeated the forces that sallied from the city against them, and finally withdrew after receiving the property their former leader had deposited in the city; they nevertheless ravaged the countryside and inflicted considerable local damage.<sup>171</sup> The Persian occupation, which must soon have followed their capture of Damascus in 613 and lasted until the peace of 629, finds no special mention, nor does the brief period of Byzantine reoccupation. In 635, Bostra surrendered to the Arabs; sources report that the governor was driven into the city (presumably after being defeated) and that the population agreed to pay the Arab poll tax.<sup>172</sup>

During this whole period, names of the metropolitan archbishops are attested in a continuous sequence until the Arab conquest.<sup>173</sup> Bostra was a center of Chalcedonian orthodoxy, following the policies of the emperor, but embedded in a countryside that was largely Monophysite. The conflicts this situation surely generated are not recorded.

The inscriptions of Bostra reveal considerable prosperity in late antiquity, culminating in the reign of Justinian.<sup>174</sup> They provide many details of urban life and buildings and especially show the importance of the imperial government and the local metropolitan archbishop in the financing of public works.

The walls were extensively rebuilt in the reign of Justinian, apparently in 541, when the invasion of Chosroes into Syria was a recent memory and current threat. Inscriptions show that the work was financed by the emperor and archbishop, and some of it executed by a *doukikos*, member of the staff of the *dux*.<sup>175</sup> Churches, likewise, were the product of imperial generosity and support of the archbishop, though in these cases the work was carried out by ecclesiastical officials. None of the churches mentioned has been located, but that dedicated to Job is perhaps to be identified with the poorhouse Procopius mentions as built by Justinian in the city.<sup>176</sup>

A certain silversmith was responsible for restoration of the aqueduct, while the guild of goldsmiths was charged with supervising unspecified public works executed at public expense.<sup>177</sup> These artisans, who were also the main bankers of a city, were men of considerable wealth whose importance was shown in the seats permanently reserved for them in the theater. A final inscription, also of an unspecified building, again names Justinian and the archbishop John.<sup>178</sup>

This intensive construction, which has no parallel in the history of Bostra, represents a height of prosperity. Building was especially active in the first fifteen years of Justinian's reign, before the great plague. It depended heavily on the central government and on the archbishop (notably John, named in seven of these ten inscriptions), who in this time

<sup>171</sup> John of Ephesus 3.42; see below, p. 252.

<sup>172</sup> Baladhuri 173, 193; cf. 234.

<sup>173</sup> See Sartre, *Bostra*, 99–118, for the history of the local church.

<sup>174</sup> See Sartre, *Bostra*, 114 f, 127–29, and the individual inscriptions in the following notes, which should be consulted with Sartre's valuable commentary.

<sup>175</sup> *IGLSyr* 9130, 9135, 9136; only the first is dated, but the others appear to be contemporary.

<sup>176</sup> Churches: *IGLSyr* 9128, 9132, 9133, 9137, 9138; poorhouse: Procopius, *Buildings* 5.9.

<sup>177</sup> *IGLSyr* 9134, 9129.

<sup>178</sup> *IGLSyr* 9131.

was responsible for public works and finances. The inscriptions give the impression that the bishop was the dominant figure in the local administration.

None of the inscriptions names the local governors or civic authorities. This is especially surprising as Bostra was the seat of two administrations, the civil headed by the *praeses* and the military under the *dux*, who had formerly commanded the legion stationed at Bostra. Although the legion is last mentioned in the early fifth century, and the frontier defenses had undergone much modification involving smaller, more mobile units, the *dux* evidently still held considerable power.<sup>179</sup>

The *praeses* was the subject of a special law of Justinian issued in 536, which raised him to the high rank of *moderator* and gives an official view of the problems of the local administration.<sup>180</sup> The law notes that the province of Arabia was rich but its treasury poor because of an extensive corruption that caused many to come to the capital to complain. The problem is diagnosed as a weak administration, in which the *praeses* was often forced to follow the orders of the *dux*. In the new regime, the *moderator* would have sufficient rank to resist both the *dux* and the *phylarch* (commander of the tribal allies discussed below), taxes would be collected, order would be maintained, and the *dux* would restrict himself to purely military affairs under threat of severe punishment. The consequences are unknown, but the inscriptions certainly do not indicate any greater role for the *moderator* than for his predecessors, and the fate of similar administrative changes attempted by Justinian in other provinces suggests that these reforms were ineffectual.

The burst of activity attested by the inscriptions is as surprising for its quantity as its sudden end. There are no inscriptions datable to the period between Justinian and the Arab conquest. This need not indicate urban decline, since plainly a great deal of new building was available to be used, but stands in notable contrast to other cities, like Gerasa, the second city of Arabia, and, as will be seen, to the country around Bostra itself.<sup>181</sup>

### *The City*

The remains present the image of a late Roman city that assumed its shape in the early third century.<sup>182</sup> Christianity brought substantial additions to the eastern part of the city, while the Umayyad period saw considerable new development.

A network of colonnaded streets formed the matrix of the city. Although none is as grand as the boulevards of Apamea or Gerasa, the total length of colonnades is far larger than in other cities since they ran along all the streets in the central area. The major axis was the east-west street of more than a kilometer marked at both ends by triumphal arches, the western Roman, the eastern Nabatean, and in the center by a tetrapylon at the intersection of the main north-south street (Figs. 24, 25). The street was almost 9 m

<sup>179</sup>Legion: for Legio III Cyrenaica, see *RE*, s.v. "Legio"; for last mention, see *Notitia Dignitatum*, *Oriens* 37.5.21.

<sup>180</sup>Justinian, Novel 102, *De Moderatore Arabiae*.

<sup>181</sup>See the discussion of Sartre, *Bostra*, 128 f.

<sup>182</sup>For the individual buildings, see the comprehensive survey of Butler IIA.4, 215–95 (to which further reference will not be given unless buildings offer material of specific interest here), and for the Roman city, A. Segal, *Town Planning and Architecture in Provincia Arabia* (Oxford, 1988), 49–73 (general), and K. Freyberger, "Einige Beobachtungen zur städtebaulichen Entwicklung des römischen Bostra," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 4 (1989), 45–60 (analytical).

wide, with sidewalks that added another 5.5 m; behind them were the finely built two-story facades of shops and other structures. East of the tetrapylon, another arch marked the entrance to the street leading south to the theater whose bulk dominated the flat site; this part of the city was the site of the major public buildings. The next intersection, marked by a monumental nymphaeum, led to a large public bath that included a long vaulted hall with an open colonnaded area adjoining the north-south street.<sup>183</sup> Another bath stood on the south side of the main street, where it was approached by a colonnaded porch that led to the main octagonal chamber with semicircular niches and the usual complex of bathing rooms (Fig. 26). All these buildings appear to have remained in use in late antiquity.

The greatest late antique activity took place in the eastern part of the city, where the whole district around the Nabatean arch was extensively rebuilt. Recent excavations here have revealed a large church whose size and plan suggest identification as the cathedral.<sup>184</sup> It forms a square 45 m on a side, within which is a circular colonnade 30 m in diameter. Semicircular exedrae fill the corners of the square, and a chancel on the east leads to the main sanctuary whose apse contained a *synthronon* and episcopal throne. Another large apsidal chancel on the south contains the baptistery, which could also be entered from the west. The whole structure apparently had a propylaea on the west, with monumental steps leading up from the level of the arch. The building was richly decorated with marble revetments and mosaics and employed many spoils carefully arranged. Although the construction has not been dated, coins and pottery indicate considerable activity in the late sixth century, which apparently included laying a new limestone paving over at least some of the earlier mosaics.

An elaborate structure of two to five stories built around a colonnaded court stands close to the cathedral, in the same orientation. Its upper floor contains a large apsidal reception room, which, together with the size and complexity of the building, indicates that it was a palace. Proximity to the cathedral suggests that it was the seat of the metropolitan archbishop. Together with another large building of similar orientation to the south, it shows that the whole quarter was completely redesigned, perhaps in the mid-fifth century, to accommodate the new ecclesiastical complex.<sup>185</sup>

The street that leads north from the Nabatean arch passes the best-known church of Bosra, dedicated to Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius.<sup>186</sup> This was formerly identified

<sup>183</sup> So identified by Freyberger, "Einige Beobachtungen"; it was formerly considered to be a market building. It has been partially excavated: see R. al-Mukdad and J.-M. Dentzer, "Les fouilles franco-syriennes à Bosra (1981–1987)," *AArchArSyr* 37.8 (1987–88), 229.

<sup>184</sup> See the report of J.-M. Dentzer, "Fouilles franco-syriennes à l'est de l'arc nabatéen (1985–1987): Une nouvelle cathédrale à Bosra?" in *La Siria araba di Roma a Bizancio*, ed. R. Farioli Campanati (Ravenna, 1989), 13–34.

<sup>185</sup> Butler IIA.4, 256–61; cf. Dentzer, "Fouilles," 31–34.

<sup>186</sup> The church has been the subject of much discussion because of its plan and relatively good state of preservation: see Butler IIA.4, 281–86; E. Kleinbauer, "The Origin and Functions of the Aisled Tetraconch Churches in Syria and Northern Mesopotamia," *DOP* 27 (1973), 107 f (for its relation to other churches of similar plan); and the recent excavation reports of R. Farioli Campanati, "Relazione sugli scavi e ricerche della Missione italo-siriana a Bosra," in Campanati (as above, note 184), 45–92 (general), and R. Farioli [Campanati], "Gli scavi della chiesa dei SS Sergio, Bacco e Leonzio a Bosra," *Berytus* 33 (1985), 61–74, both with full reference to earlier work. The most recent excavations are reported in R. Farioli Campanati, "Bosra Chiesa dei SS. Sergio, Bacco e Leonzio: I nuovi ritrovamenti (1988–1989)," in *La Syrie de Byzance à l'Islam*, ed. P. Canivet and J. Rey-Coquais (Damascus, 1992), 173–78.

as the cathedral, but now appears to have been a pilgrimage church. Like the newly discovered church, it is of a tetraconch plan, with a circular colonnade and exedrae within a rectangle, and three projecting apses on the east (Fig. 27). Although the entire structure is comparable in size to the cathedral (it measures  $37 \times 50$  m), its interior colonnade, which apparently supported a dome, is only 13 m in diameter and thus substantially smaller than that of the cathedral. The church was richly decorated with imported marble revetments and mosaics. An inscription shows that it was built in 512, and excavations have determined that it long continued in use, with additions that include apsidal rooms beside the main apses, apparently the ends of a colonnade around the church.

Another palatial building stood immediately to the east of this church; it has rooms on three levels around a colonnaded court and includes a triconch reception hall (Fig. 28). Apparently of the sixth century, its function has not been determined.<sup>187</sup> North of the church, but not connected with it, is a vast basilica with an apse facing east and apparently an internal colonnade (Fig. 29); another similar structure stood on its north.<sup>188</sup> Although neither the date nor purpose of these structures has been determined, they appear to be late antique.

Unlike the other cities studied here, Bostra had a major place in Islamic tradition. Although the sources record little of its history beside the mere fact of its conquest in 635, and that it was the capital of the district, *kura*, of Hauran in the military province, or *jund*, of Damascus under the Umayyads, its association with the Prophet has guaranteed its continuing significance for Muslims.<sup>189</sup> The town was important enough to have been a mint for copper coins in the early eighth century, but they appear to have been struck in very small quantities on only two occasions.<sup>190</sup> One event, at the end of the period here considered, was evidently of great consequence: the earthquake of January 749 is reported to have “swallowed up” the city; evidence of its effects will be seen in the remains.<sup>191</sup>

A well-known story relates that Muhammad, when he was a boy, accompanied a caravan from Mecca to Syria. When it reached Bostra, the natural entrepôt for such trade, at the edge of the desert, he was hailed by a Christian monk, Bahira, who foretold the glory of his mission. Bahira could know this because he had access to unaltered versions of the Christian scriptures from which the name and mission of Muhammad had not yet been deleted.<sup>192</sup> Other traditions recount that the merchants of Mecca frequently traveled to Syria, especially to Bostra. Two caravans a year are supposed to have connected the two cities, for trade in wine and cereals as well as armor and metalwork, suggesting

<sup>187</sup> Butler IIA.4, 286–88, and 260 for the date; there is another similar building, poorly preserved, directly across the street. The surveyed structure was formerly identified as the bishop’s palace, as the church was considered to be the cathedral.

<sup>188</sup> Butler IIA.4, 265–70.

<sup>189</sup> Conquest: Baladhuri 173, cf. 193, 234; province: Ibn Khordadbeh 77 and Yakubi (in Le Strange, *Palestine*, 425), both writing in the 9th century.

<sup>190</sup> See the table in Qedar, “Copper Coinage” (as above, note 9), 37.

<sup>191</sup> Reported by Michael the Syrian 9.22 (trans. J. B. Chabot [Paris, 1899–1910], II, 509); cf. K. Russell, “The Earthquake Chronology of Palestine and Northwest Arabia from the 2nd through the Mid-9th Century AD,” *BASOR* 260 (1985), 47–49.

<sup>192</sup> See A. Abel, “Bahira,” in *EI* (1960), with full references; but see also P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Oxford, 1987), 219 f, with analysis of the unhistoricity of this story.

that contact between them was of real importance for both.<sup>193</sup> Finally, the camel who brought the first copy of the Qur'an to Syria is supposed to have stopped and knelt down just at the edge of Bostra by the city walls.<sup>194</sup>

Whatever such traditions may be worth, it is clear that Muslims settled early in Bostra (or made many converts there) and that the Umayyads permanently changed the face of the city.<sup>195</sup> Their major contribution was the great mosque of Umar, which stands in the middle of the city on the eastern of the two north-south colonnaded streets (Fig. 30). It forms an irregular square of about 34 m on a side and has an arcaded portico on the east that gave access to the street, evidently still in use at the time of building. The mosque is well built, almost entirely from spoils, and contains a triple colonnade around three sides of the central space and a projecting semicircular *mihrab*, perhaps the oldest of its kind, on the south. It is roofed with stone slabs and has an external staircase that led up to a structure on the roof, an early form of minaret (Fig. 31).<sup>196</sup> An inscription of 720, which names the builder al-Harith and the caliph Yazid, refers to the construction of the minaret and provides an approximate date for the original structure.<sup>197</sup> Some rebuilding, perhaps of the internal colonnades, was executed by the *emir*, apparently the local governor Othman ibn al-Hakam, in 745. The inscriptions show that the mosque existed in the early eighth century; it may owe its name to the caliph Umar II (717–720), who could have begun the construction. Alternatively, it could have been attributed to the more famous caliph Umar (634–644), under whom the city was conquered, as part of the general association of Bostra with the earliest period of Islam. In any case, the erection of such a dominant building in the middle of the city shows not only that the place was of real importance in the Umayyad period but also that Islam had established a major presence there.

A second mosque is more enigmatic. The small Jami al-Mabrak at the northwest corner of the Roman wall is supposed to mark the place where the camel bringing the Qur'an knelt (Fig. 32). Its earliest part consists of two small chambers separated by a wall of extremely fine masonry; the southern chamber contains a projecting apsidal *mihrab* (Figs. 33, 34). The arch, pilasters, and decoration of the *mihrab* bear such a striking resemblance to the late antique ecclesiastical architecture of the region that an early date, probably Umayyad, seems assured.<sup>198</sup> This, too, indicates an important Muslim presence, which may perhaps have dominated the northern part of the city as the Christian continued to do in the eastern section.

Disuse of the Roman walls indicated by the construction of this mosque may reflect the establishment of firm control over the region by the Umayyads. At some point, however, the openings of the theater were blocked up and the building converted into a

<sup>193</sup> See Sartre, *Bostra*, 129–32; these traditions, too, are worthless according to Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 115–19, 138 f, 196–99.

<sup>194</sup> See A. Abel, "Bosra," in *EF*<sup>2</sup>, 1276.

<sup>195</sup> See, in general, S. Ory and S. Moughdad, "Bosra, cité islamique en Syrie," *Archeologia* 148 (1980), 22–33.

<sup>196</sup> See the descriptions of Butler IIA.4, 289–92, and especially of K. C. Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, II (Oxford, 1940), 484–91, with criticism of earlier theories. That the early minaret was not the present square tower is shown by J. Bloom, *Minaret, Symbol of Islam* (Oxford, 1989), 31 f.

<sup>197</sup> For this and the following, see J. Sauvaget, "Les inscriptions arabes de la mosquée de Bosra," *Syria* 22 (1941), 53–65.

<sup>198</sup> See Butler IIA.4, 294 f, and Ory and Moughdad, "Bosra," 26, for the dating.



fortification. This has been associated with the great tribal disturbances that afflicted the last decades of Umayyad rule, but no date for the work has been determined.<sup>199</sup>

The establishment of Islam certainly did not obliterate Christianity. Bishops are attested through the period of Persian occupation until 635, the date of the conquest, after which there is a long gap. The organized church was evidently in trouble in the first years of Arab rule: Pope Martin I in 649 had to entrust the churches of Arabia and Palestine to Bishop John of Philadelphia because there were only two bishops left in the province.<sup>200</sup> Yet a text and an inscription (considered below) indicate that bishops were in place in the eighth century, suggesting that the church recovered, at least temporarily, while the remains show that the Christian community flourished through the Umayyad period.

The cathedral continued to stand and evidently to function for a century or more after the Arab conquest. Excavations in the building uncovered sherds of the Umayyad period, together with evidence that trenches had been dug to inspect the foundations of the colonnade after an earthquake of the seventh or eighth century, probably the great quake of 749. If so, the church apparently survived that catastrophe. It was eventually occupied by domestic installations, apparently at a much later time.<sup>201</sup>

The fate of the other tetraconch church, dedicated to Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius, was much different. Its dome and colonnade collapsed, and the magnificent church of late antiquity was replaced by a small three-aisled basilica.<sup>202</sup> This incorporated the chancel, which was extended by two rows of columns reused from the original church to occupy a fraction of its central space. It employed a new pavement of basalt blocks laid over the rubble of the destroyed church and including an inscription that names an archbishop Jacob. Its crude lettering, careless spelling, and lack of the usual titles suggest a date in the seventh or eighth century.<sup>203</sup> The excavators have tentatively dated the new structure to the seventh century; it may more probably represent rebuilding on a much reduced scale after the earthquake of 749. It shows in any case that the Christian community no longer had the resources to maintain two such large and elaborate churches.

Excavations in secular buildings show significant transformations in this period. The large bath in the center of the city was completely destroyed and abandoned for some time. Part of it was reoccupied by an establishment that made extensive use of animal bones, perhaps for producing luxury goods. These changes have not been dated.<sup>204</sup> The south baths, between the main street and the theater, were severely damaged in the quake of 749. They were still in active use in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, then saw a second period of activity after the quake when bread ovens were inserted over the ruins of the hypocausts, while the eastern part of the building, still standing, was used for artisan and industrial activity. The building was abandoned altogether by the early ninth century.<sup>205</sup>

<sup>199</sup>See Ory and Moughdad, "Bosra," 28.

<sup>200</sup>For the 7th-century church, see Sartre, *Bostra*, 115 f, and "Arabia" in *DHGE*.

<sup>201</sup>Dentzer, "Fouilles," 26–28.

<sup>202</sup>Most recently described, with plans, by Farioli [Campanati], "Gli scavi della chiesa."

<sup>203</sup>See the comments of Sartre, *Bostra*, 117.

<sup>204</sup>See al-Mukdad and Dentzer, "Les fouilles à Bosra," 229.

<sup>205</sup>See S. Berthier, "Sondage dans le secteur des Thermes Sud à Busra," *Berytus* 33 (1985), 5–46; cf. al-Mukdad and Dentzer, "Les fouilles à Bosra," 228 f.

Similar changes affected the square by the Nabatean arch. The pavement was partly demolished and the blocks taken away, probably around the turn of the seventh century. During the Umayyad period a large drain was still maintained, but intrusive walls show that the open space was no longer being maintained. The district appears to have been abandoned in the Abbasid period. By then it had been filled with small structures—residences, shops, or industrial installations—that manifest various stages of construction, most of them apparently of the Umayyad period.<sup>206</sup>

The excavations have uncovered one building relating to this period outside the city center. This is a substantial house built on the tell of the prehistoric settlement at the northwestern edge of the city immediately within the Roman walls. At the time of its construction, these walls were no longer in use, as the house stands at the very edge of the hill, leaving no room for fortifications. Its location, overlooking fields and vineyards, suggests that it was a farmhouse. It was well built of basalt blocks on a deep stone foundation, with walls covered with mud plaster and floors of stone slabs. Six or more vaulted rooms of 6 × 5 m formed a wing that faced onto an unpaved court where cooking vessels, refuse pits, and bones of sheep and goats show that many domestic activities were carried on. Finds of pottery, lamps, and glass show a relatively high standard of living but one consistent with that of successful peasants. There is no evidence that the house was a suburban villa. Finds, especially of pottery, suggest that the house was a construction of the early Umayyad period. It was occupied for a century until it was suddenly destroyed and abandoned as a result of the great earthquake of 749.<sup>207</sup>

The archaeology, far more than the historical sources, allows the development of Bosra to be visualized. Inscriptions from the reign of Justinian attest more construction, of secular and ecclesiastical buildings, than known from any other period. The written record is otherwise silent. Yet the remains confirm the sixth century as a flourishing time, with the church of Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius built and the great cathedral redecorated. Prosperity evidently continued until the Persian occupation.

The fate of Bosra under the Persians, the Byzantine reoccupation, or the early caliphs is unknown. Under Umayyad rule, however, it became a major Muslim center. The substantial mosque of Umar can be seen as a triumphal sign of the new rulers and their religion, implanted in the center of the city. Islam also brought the mosque of al-Mabrak but certainly did not obliterate Christianity. On the contrary, the cathedral was maintained through the whole period. The church of Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius, though, had a different fate, being reduced to a small basilica constructed within its spacious interior. Whether this indicates a decline of the Christian community or, as seems more likely, the results of the great earthquake of 749, has not been determined. Normal urban life also appears to have continued, to judge by the remains of the south baths and construction of the comfortable farmhouse at the edge of the city.

<sup>206</sup>J. Dentzer et al., "Sondages près de l'arc nabatéen à Bosra," *Berytus* 32 (1984), 163–74; the sequence of development is not very clear. See the summary of al-Mukdad and Dentzer, "Les fouilles à Bosra," 224 f.

<sup>207</sup>See the reports of J. Wilson and M. Sa'ad, "The Domestic Material Culture of Busra from the Nabatean to the Umayyad Periods," *Berytus* 32 (1984), 35–148, esp. 40–52, and H. Seeden, "Busra, 1983–84: Second Archaeological Report," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 3 (1988), 400–411. The excavators refer to this building as a "Umayyad farmhouse," but the remains include much late antique pottery; the building may in fact be earlier than suggested. For the few coins found on the site, of the late 6th through mid-8th centuries, see G. Rotter, "Die Münzen des umayyadischen Hauses in Busra," *Berytus* 33 (1985), 47–50.

It seems that the life of Bostra continued without a major break until the devastating earthquake of 749, which shook the cathedral and destroyed the baths and the farmhouse. As the chronicler reports, the city was “swallowed up.” Subsequently, it vanishes from history, not to reappear in any significant context until the eleventh century.

### *The Region of Bostra*

Bostra controlled an exceptionally large territory, comprising the plain of the Hauran and much of the adjacent Jebel Druse, an area of about  $80 \times 40$  km (Fig E).<sup>208</sup> In addition, it was the natural (and ecclesiastical) center of a much larger region of southern Syria that includes the volcanic plain of al-Leja. This begins some 40 km north of the city and occupies an area of about  $35 \times 40$  km. The plain of Batanea, which slopes away from the Leja on the west, manifests some important regional differences associated with a new element of the population, the nomad tribes. As extensive surveys have been carried out in the entire region, it will all be considered here, beginning with the district closest to Bostra.<sup>209</sup>

The written sources reveal somewhat more about the countryside than the city. They narrate, in particular, the history of the Ghassanids, who played a tremendously important role here in the sixth century; they will be considered below in connection with the region they inhabited. Sources show that much of the area was devastated in the Ghassanid revolt of 581 and that the great earthquake of 749 afflicted at least the western part: Nawa and Deraa, both northwest of Bostra, are specifically mentioned.<sup>210</sup>

Both the plain of the Hauran and the adjacent mountain are well suited to agriculture and thus intensive settlement.<sup>211</sup> The rich volcanic soil of the plain has always supported cereal crops and livestock raising. Pasturage and local transhumance have been important at all times, but settled agriculture became the dominant form of land use in Roman times. Rainfall is adequate for normal production, but irrigation is difficult because of the long summer drought, during which water may be drawn from wells or carefully stored in cisterns. The mountain, on the other hand, has more abundant water, especially on its western slopes (the eastern, which lead down to the desert, are much dryer); its soil, however, is stony. This land was used for vines, fruit trees, and some olives. It is possible that rainfall was more abundant in antiquity, allowing greater production in both regions. It is estimated that 90 percent of the plain and most of the slopes of the

<sup>208</sup>See A. Alt, “Das Territorium von Bostra,” *ZDPV* 68 (1951), 238–45.

<sup>209</sup>The most important surveys are those of Butler IIA.5 and *ibid.*, 7, and J.-M. Dentzer, *Hauran*, I (Paris, 1985). For a convenient historical sketch of the region in the period considered here, see M. Sartre, “Le Hawran byzantin à la veille de la conquête musulmane,” *Bilad al-Sham* 2 (1987), 547–96. The archaeological evidence for the entire region is summarized with full references in H. MacAdam, “Settlements and Settlement Patterns in Northern and Central Transjordan,” in King and Cameron, *Near East* (as above, note 32), 53–68.

<sup>210</sup>Ghassanid revolt: see above, note 171; earthquake: above, note 191.

<sup>211</sup>Doris Miller’s thesis, “The Lava Lands of Syria: Regional Urbanism in the Roman Empire” (New York University, 1984), 8–55, provides an excellent account of the geography of southern Syria; the rest deals with the Nabatean and Roman periods, with much useful background for the present study. For the geographic conditions of this region, see P. Gentelle, “Éléments pour une histoire des paysages et du peuplement du Djebel Hauran septentrional,” in *Hauran*, I (as above, note 209), 19–62, and F. Villeneuve, “L’économie rurale et la vie des campagnes dans le Hauran antique,” *ibid.*, 63–136, esp. 67–71, 121–26.

mountain were cultivated. The Leja, with its undecomposed volcanic rock, stands apart as a district more suitable for shepherds and bandits, but cultivation was extensive around its edges, especially in the plain of Batanea, which has abundant sources of water and a rich soil.

This agricultural wealth produced an intensive settlement comparable to that of northern Syria. The region contains the remains of innumerable villages, separated by 3–5 km in the most fertile districts. Villages were built everywhere that water was available, usually on slightly higher ground than the surrounding fields. Although some are abandoned, many are still occupied and thus the subject of constant rebuilding that has often obscured earlier remains. In addition, the vast majority of the buildings were constructed of basalt blocks set in mud mortar that have often collapsed into piles of rubble. Because of their poor preservation and a general lack of excavation, the villages of this district do not offer the kind of specific information available for the limestone hills, but nevertheless present general traits that allow a development to be traced.

They show primarily that this was an area of intensive late antique settlement. Virtually all the sites have remains of that period and usually far more of them than of any earlier or later time. Like northern Syria, this area reached the height of its development, the culmination of a long period of occupation, in the sixth century. Similarly also, it shows both continuity and change in the first century of Arab rule, with an almost universal desolation by the end of the ninth century.<sup>212</sup>

This was essentially a region of villages; Bostra is the only large city, and the smaller cities, which functioned as bishoprics, are hardly more than large villages.<sup>213</sup> The villages themselves, which blanketed the whole area, were connected by paths that radiated out in all directions toward their neighbors, forming a basic network through which the Roman roads centered on Bostra cut in straight lines. The roads were a major intrusive element in this landscape, intersecting it and connecting it with the outside world. Another was the villa, center perhaps of a large estate, brought by the Romans to the immediate vicinity of Bostra only. Monasteries were also added to this system in late antiquity; they tended to resemble villages, often occupying marginal land on the edge of the region. The villagers thus constituted the overwhelming majority of the settled population. They had close neighbors, however, who practiced a very different way of life—the nomads. These lived in the desert to the east but also had a major presence in Batanea, northwest of Bostra; they will be discussed in connection with that region.

The villages varied in size from a few houses to small towns.<sup>214</sup> Each had its own territory defined by boundary markers and its own civic organization with officials, a council, common funds, and land set aside for common purposes.<sup>215</sup> Villages were rarely fortified and were built on no regular plan. Houses were oriented as the owners chose and connected simply by irregular passages between them. In some cases, they were set close enough together for their walls to form an outer line of defense, suitable against

<sup>212</sup> See the clear statement of Butler in his introduction to the southern Hauran, IIA.2, 66.

<sup>213</sup> For what follows, see Villeneuve, "L'économie," 113–16 (villas), 118–20 (monasteries).

<sup>214</sup> The following is based on Villeneuve, "L'économie," 76–89.

<sup>215</sup> Details of the organization are known from inscriptions: see Villeneuve, "L'économie," 79–89, a discussion that does not distinguish periods; most of the evidence appears to be Roman, but some at least pertains to late antiquity. There is also much material of interest in H. MacAdam, "Epigraphy and Village Life in

wild animals or bandits but not sustained attack. The towers so characteristic of other regions are rarely found here. This reflects not only the distance of the region from the frontier, with the raids of Persians and their allies, but also the establishment of a new defensive system, which made use of the nomad tribes. Villages often contained much open space, some of it evidently used for storage of water, some perhaps for communal meetings; they were normally surrounded by cisterns (in addition to those in the houses) and graveyards. Occasionally they had baths or other public buildings but for the most part contained only houses and churches.

Village houses followed a consistent basic plan with a unit of two adjacent rooms and two floors: the lower, with mangers, for the animals, the upper for residence. The houses, which could be expanded to include several such units, faced onto enclosed courtyards. Each house had its own existence separate from that of its neighbors; the houses were closed to the exterior, their main facades opening not onto a street but onto the inner courtyard. In this they resemble the houses of northern Syria and reflect a mentality in which privacy and private property were fundamental. The proprietors were evidently peasant farmers, exploiting their own piece of land near the village but sharing in many common activities.

Lack of excavation and the long continuity of the same building traditions have made dating the village structures extremely difficult.<sup>216</sup> Many houses and especially churches, though, do bear building inscriptions. They indicate that the region developed early in late antiquity: in most sites, the inscriptions are predominantly of the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>217</sup> Later inscriptions are less common but sufficiently numerous to show continuity through the early seventh century. The latest inscriptions are considered below.

Architectural decoration also provides some evidence for development and comparison.<sup>218</sup> In general, decoration is less common in late antiquity than in earlier periods; it tends to be limited to lintels and capitals and to be simplified. The richest decoration appears in the west, in the district noted for its larger houses, while in the Hauran it tends to be of low quality. By the sixth century, however, a simple stylized decoration becomes universal, as the Greco-Roman tradition of decoration disappears in favor of local traditions. In all this, the region seems far less vital artistically than northern Syria. The churches of Bostra form a notable, though extremely limited, exception to this pattern.

Study of the houses, based on the limited chronological evidence available, has suggested that large houses become more common in late antiquity and thus that increasing

---

Southern Syria during the Roman and Byzantine Periods," *Berytus* 31 (1983), 103–15, but it also fails to sort out the information by periods. See most recently M. Sartre, "Communautés villageoises et structures sociales d'après l'épigraphie de la Syrie du Sud," in *Lepigrafia del villaggio* (Faenza, 1993), 117–35, and especially J. D. Grainger, "Village Government in Roman Syria and Arabia," *Levant* 27 (1995), 179–95, who shows that the villages had no real independence but were clearly subordinated to the governors.

<sup>216</sup>There have been some excavations, but little material relevant for the present subject has been revealed: see below on Msayke and Si', p. 254.

<sup>217</sup>See the tabulations in Butler IIA.2, 347–51, a list that includes dated buildings but not all the dated inscriptions.

<sup>218</sup>See J. Dentzer-Feydy, "Décor architectural et développement du Hawran dans l'antiquité," in *Hauran*, I (as above, note 209), 261–309, esp. 299–308.

prosperity accompanied the maintenance or even increase in the number of sites. There is no doubt that the region continued to flourish despite Persian and Arab conquests. In the Umayyad period, however, the evidence changes its nature and thereafter gradually disappears.

The vast majority of the sites in this district are villages, but some are larger and more complex than the others, perhaps because they had a special function in the local administration or economy. In addition, one region, which is considered below, had a special development because of the introduction of a new element into the population—tribal nomads used for regional defense.

The walled town of Umm al-Jimal (whose ancient name is unknown) rises from the flat, dry basalt plain some 25 km southwest of Bostra.<sup>219</sup> It was the largest place between Bostra and Philadelphia (Amman) and center of the densely populated district with more than seventy villages that stood at the southern edge of the region of Bostra.

The site forms an irregular rectangle, some 800 m long and 300–500 m wide, surrounded by Roman walls that were abandoned by the early fifth century.<sup>220</sup> Tombs extended outside the walls, as did the aqueduct that led to hills several kilometers away. The area within the walls contained a great deal of open space that often bears traces of pens for animals.<sup>221</sup> Two buildings of the town were especially dominant. The so-called praetorium by the west gate contained two groups of rooms in a large courtyard. On the south was a simple suite of four chambers, while the northern rooms, some of them rising to two stories, stood around a colonnaded atrium.<sup>222</sup> One of the rooms is an unusual vaulted cruciform chamber whose parallels suggest it was an audience hall. The building is difficult to date but appears to be of the sixth century.<sup>223</sup>

The other structure also appears to be associated with administration, in this case military. Standing at the south end of the open space, near the south wall, it consists of a series of rooms around a large rectangular courtyard; it has a projecting chapel and two towers with a series of short Christian invocations on a white stone that stands out in striking contrast to the black basalt of the structure (Fig. 35). Chapel and towers appear to have been added in the sixth century. The building has been plausibly identified as a barracks.<sup>224</sup> Its construction represents a major change in the life of the settlement, which had been primarily a military base in the fourth century. These barracks were evidently designed to house a far smaller detachment of troops, while the town enjoyed a domestic life based primarily on agriculture. This transformation reflects the change in imperial policy from large military bases on or near this frontier to reliance on the

<sup>219</sup>It forms the subject of an entire volume, IIA.3, of the Butler survey; see the general introduction, 149–53. References to individual buildings will be given as needed. The site has been partially excavated, with results that change earlier views: see B. de Vries, “The Umm al-Jimal Project, 1972–77,” *BASOR* 244 (1981), 53–72, and idem, “The Umm al-Jimal Project, 1981–1992,” *AJard* 37 (1993), 433–60. A major report, in two volumes, by de Vries and his collaborators is now in press.

<sup>220</sup>For the development of the site in the periods studied here, see de Vries (1993), esp. 448–54.

<sup>221</sup>See De Vries (1981), 63; but strictly speaking these could have been set up at any period until modern times by local Bedouin who sheltered their flocks in the ruins.

<sup>222</sup>Butler IIA.3, 160–66.

<sup>223</sup>De Vries (1981), 70.

<sup>224</sup>Butler IIA.3, 166–71; de Vries (1981), 70.



Ghassanid allies, who maintained a high degree of stability during the sixth century; they are discussed below.

Umm al-Jimal contains no less than fifteen churches, all simple hall churches or three-aisled basilicas, none of any great architectural or decorative distinction.<sup>225</sup> The largest, which encroaches on the open space, bears a date of 557. Most of the others are undated. The abundance of churches has not been explained.<sup>226</sup>

Houses covered the greatest part of the occupied space.<sup>227</sup> They are laid out on no regular plan but are simply separated by gaps and passages rather than streets. The houses are of the usual type, built in two-storied blocks around courtyards, with any decoration visible only from the inside; the exteriors are usually blank and forbidding. Normally, the ground floor contained stables, with mangers for sheep and goats or larger beasts, and barns for storage of fodder; latrines, where they exist, are on this level. As usual, the residences were upstairs. The town contained more than 120 such house blocks; it may have had a population of five thousand.

Although a military and administrative role is indicated by the barracks and praetorium of this large town, its function was primarily agricultural. Mangers in the houses show that here, as in the villages, animals lived directly beside the people, while the great open space in the center has led to a variety of explanations, most recently that the town functioned as a market for animals. It was in any case the center of a district with a sophisticated system for collecting and distributing water and with extensive terracing for fields. The town may also have prospered from a caravan trade along the roads that led through it from the Gulf of Aqaba, Bostra, and Damascus.

Although Umm al-Jimal stands out in this flat desert region, it is not unique but might be best understood in the context of similar sites elsewhere. Sha'rah in the northwest part of the Leja, for example, offers many similarities.<sup>228</sup> It is of comparable plan and size, about 600 × 500 m, has large houses irregularly arranged, and also contains many open spaces whose function has not been determined. Pagan cult, storage of water, common community functions, or a camp for nomads have all been suggested. The site has not been excavated.

One part of this district manifests an exceptional development, revealed by the remains and surely to be explained by historical circumstances. The villages of Batanea, west of the Leja, seem to have been far more prosperous than any others, with larger houses built on a more complex plan.<sup>229</sup> At Nawa, for example, some of the houses consist of several wings, with the usual stables and courtyards, but one of them has in addition a side building with a reception room on the ground floor. This arrangement is totally uncharacteristic, as the ground floor was normally reserved for animals and related activ-

<sup>225</sup> Butler IIA.3, 171–94.

<sup>226</sup> Khirbet al-Samra (see below, pp. 253–54) presents a similar situation. Geoffrey King suggests that the large number of churches may reflect a multiplicity of sects, but there is no evidence to support such a notion. See his "The Umayyad Qusur and Related Settlements in Jordan," *Bilad al-Sham* 4 (Amman, 1989), 74.

<sup>227</sup> Butler IIA.3, 194–205, to be revised by the discoveries of G. Corbett, "Investigations at Julianos' Church at Umm el-Jimal," *PBSR* 25 (1957), 39–61, esp. 43–49, who shows that many of the houses had provisions for animals and makes suggestions about the function of the great open space; cf. de Vries (1981), 53–63.

<sup>228</sup> See the description in *Hauran*, I (as above, note 209), 83–89.

<sup>229</sup> For this district and its houses, see Villeneuve, "L'économie," 104–13.

ities. More enigmatic are the houses of Kafr Shams, which have untypically large doors and windows, several entrances, and no stables. In this, they differ entirely from the normal peasant house, which is closed to the outside and has its animals in the courtyard. In all these cases, the architectural decoration is much richer than usual in the region.<sup>230</sup> Even more impressive is the palatial building at Inkhil (Figs. 36, 37).<sup>231</sup> It consists of a great vaulted hall, flanked by chambers on three levels, and numerous other rooms. It is built with finely cut and finished basalt blocks without mortar and bears an elaborate sculptural decoration inside and outside.

Neither the date nor purpose of this building has been determined, nor have the differences that the other houses manifest been explained. To some extent, the presence of large houses could simply reflect the agricultural wealth of the district; Nawa, in particular, was praised in the tenth century for its wheat and cereals.<sup>232</sup> Absence of stables could be explained by positing that the owner was the proprietor of landed estates and did not raise cattle. Association of this district with known historical circumstances, however, may provide a more profitable line of inquiry.

Nawa was supposedly destroyed in the earthquake of 749, but, as noted above, was prosperous in later centuries, and many of its houses still stand. Although the history of the sites of this district has not been determined, they were immediately adjacent to one place that was of great importance in the sixth century, that is, Gabatha, better known in the Arabic form Jabiya, the headquarters of the Ghassanid princes.<sup>233</sup>

These powerful allies, on whom the empire came to depend heavily, were originally Arab nomads in the Hejaz. They were settled within the Roman frontiers by Anastasius, who concluded a formal alliance with them in 490. During the wars with Persia under Justinian, they became an extremely important element in the offensive and defensive policies of the empire. Their chief, Arethas (al-Harith, 529–569), received the title of patrician, one of the highest in the empire, and was given control of a large part of the Syrian frontier to defend against the Persians and their allies, the Arab tribe of the Lakhmids. Justinian promoted him in 531 when the normal system of defense, with frontier forces commanded by *duces*, had proved ineffectual.<sup>234</sup> The tribal chief thus played the dual role of phylarch, or head of his people, and defender of the Roman frontier. In that capacity, he had equal authority with the *dux* of Bostra, with whom he usually cooperated, often to the detriment of the civil governor. He did not, however, live in Bostra but in open country where the imperial authority could not be so directly exercised over him.<sup>235</sup>

The tribes thus established in Syria protected the frontier and trade routes and pursued an aggressive policy against the Lakhmids. In addition to their usual activities of

<sup>230</sup> See Dentzer-Feydy, "Décor architectural," 300–307, with illustrations.

<sup>231</sup> Butler IIA.312–15, dated with much hesitation to the 2nd century; but see Dentzer-Feydy, "Décor architectural," 307 n. 74, with a later (but unspecified) dating based on the decoration. François Villeneuve (personal communication) is inclined to favor a 5th-century date.

<sup>232</sup> Maqdisi, cited in Villeneuve, "L'économie," 122; the following explanation is that of Villeneuve.

<sup>233</sup> For the Ghassanids, see the comprehensive and massively documented study of Irfan Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1995); and specifically for the region studied here, M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982), 155–93. See also M. Sartre, "Deux phylarques arabes dans l'Arabie byzantine," *Le Muséon* 106 (1993), 145–53.

<sup>234</sup> See Procopius, *Wars* 1.17.47–48.

<sup>235</sup> Sartre, *Trois études*, 164, 171, 186 f.

stock raising and caravan trade, they made huge profits in Roman service. The increase in their resources, and settlement in an agricultural district, led to their sedentarization, at least in part (the details are unknown), and to a good deal of building.<sup>236</sup> The Ghassanid princes became major patrons of architecture, both civil—palaces and audience halls—and ecclesiastical, for they were enthusiastic Monophysites who patronized their church throughout the region they controlled. Remains of their work are visible in the region east of Damascus, near the Euphrates and north of Bostra, and numerous monasteries, most of which have not been located, are attributed to their patronage.<sup>237</sup>

Only one building in this district, at al-Hayat east of the Leja, is indisputably a work of the Ghassanids; it bears an inscription showing that it was built in 578 by a *procurator* under the patrician Alamoundaros (al-Mundhir, Ghassanid ruler, 569–582). This great palatial house consists of some thirty-five rooms on two and three levels around a courtyard 10 m square. The court is uncharacteristic in being relatively small and completely shut in; it is therefore unsuitable for keeping animals and seems more to resemble the inner courts of an urban house.<sup>238</sup> This building by itself shows that some of the nomads were settled and that their leaders had considerable wealth.

The great camp of the Ghassanids, their military headquarters and functional capital, was at Jabiya. The site, of which little survives, consisted of tents and houses as well as a monastery dedicated to St. Sergius (whom the Ghassanids patronized in their famous seat of Rusafa).<sup>239</sup> It occupies an appropriate setting on hills adjacent to a large plain whose rich soil and abundant water provided ample fodder for flocks and herds of the tribes; even in modern times it has been a summer pasture for tribes from Arabia. It stands in convenient proximity to the natural routes to Palestine, Jordan, Damascus, and, of course, the Roman frontier.

Although there are no surviving remains at Jabiya to attest the architectural patronage for which the Ghassanids were renowned, it seems at least possible that their presence can explain the unusual architecture of the neighboring villages of Batanea. Their large, richly decorated houses could reflect the wealth of the tribal chiefs, and the architectural peculiarities their different way of life. Their houses did not need to be completely closed in, like those of peasants, and could have larger doors and windows because they had no one to fear; they, essentially, ruled the countryside. The lack of stables in many of them could indicate that the horses and camels that gave these fighters their mobility shared a common military pasture. The enigmatic audience chamber on ground level at Nawa would suit a tribal chief and finds a much grander parallel in that of al-Mundhir himself outside the walls of Rusafa. Finally, it seems possible that the palace at Inkhil might have

<sup>236</sup>For sedentarization, see also the brief remarks of Villeneuve, "L'économie," 116–18.

<sup>237</sup>For summary lists of Ghassanid buildings, see *EI*, s.v. "Ghassan," and Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I (as above, note 143), 636 f; see also J. Sauvaget, "Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis," *Byzantion* 14 (1939), 115–30, and especially Sartre, *Trois études*, 178–88, a comprehensive treatment of Ghassanid historical geography. Note also the recent discussion of Irfan Shahîd, "Ghassanid and Umayyad Structures: A Case of Byzance après Byzance," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie* (as above, note 186), 299–307.

<sup>238</sup>Plans and descriptions in Butler IIA.5, 362 f.

<sup>239</sup>See, in general, H. Lammens and J. Sourdel-Thomine, "al-Djabiya," in *EI*, especially valuable for the Islamic period. The site is described by L. Caetani in *Annali dell'Islam* (Rome, 1905–18), III, 927 f; for the monastery and further references, see Sartre, *Trois études*, 179.

belonged to a Ghassanid chief. To establish that, of course, proper analysis of the decoration would be necessary so that a date could be determined.<sup>240</sup>

Presence of the Ghassanids also explains another peculiarity of the entire region here studied—its lack of defensive structures. Except for the walls of Bostra and the forts of the frontier (mostly outside this region), there are virtually none of the towers that are ubiquitous in many regions further north. This lack corresponds closely to the regions occupied or protected by the Ghassanids, whose job was to defend the frontiers of the desert, while the Romans continued to maintain numerous and powerful fortresses along the Euphrates and in northern Syria, where major invasion by the Persians might be expected.<sup>241</sup>

The Ghassanids functioned as valuable allies until the reign of Maurice (582–602), when they fell out with the Romans. Al-Mundhir was captured by treachery and sent into exile in 582, an event that provoked a massive revolt by his followers.<sup>242</sup> When the emperor cut off their supply of grain—an important means of controlling them—they ravaged large districts of Arabia and Syria, besieged Bostra, and only desisted when al-Mundhir's son al-Nu'man was allowed to assume the phylarchy. In 584, however, he too was exiled, and the Ghassanid confederation broke up into numerous smaller units. Although some continued to fight alongside the Romans as late as the Arab invasions, their power was broken, and the country, which had depended so heavily on them for its defense, lay open to attack from a totally unexpected quarter.

The history of the Ghassanids allows the development of one part of this region to be understood, but for most of it late antiquity can only be seen in general terms, with some indication of increasing prosperity through the sixth century which, here as elsewhere, seems to mark a high point. There is, however, some remarkably specific evidence for the crucial period of transition in the first half of the seventh century. Inscriptions of churches, usually associated with new mosaic floors, show continuity through the Persian and Arab conquests and beyond. The Umayyad presence is prominent in several parts of the region, as standing remains and surveys reveal. Thereafter, however, settlement seems to come to an almost universal end.

Although the Persian occupation (613–630) has left virtually no trace in Syria, two sites in the southwestern part of this region show activity during that time. Samma, some 20 km west of Bostra, contains five groups of buildings, mostly houses, and an outlying monastery consisting of several rooms around a courtyard and a basilical church dedicated to St. George.<sup>243</sup> One of the monastic buildings bears a building inscription of 624. This relates not to the entire complex but to the addition of two rooms adjacent to the apse of the church.<sup>244</sup> It nevertheless shows that normal activity was going on and that the Christian community here had the freedom and resources to add to its church.

<sup>240</sup> See above, note 218, and note that Butler at first believed that the combination of classical and oriental elements in the decoration indicated a late date, and even mentioned the Ghassanids. He opted, however, for the 2nd century because of the quality of the work.

<sup>241</sup> These points are made by Sauvaget, "Les Ghassanides et Sergiopolis."

<sup>242</sup> Sartre, *Trois études*, 189–94, much of it based on John of Ephesus 3.42 f.

<sup>243</sup> Butler IIA.2, 83–87.

<sup>244</sup> See the analysis of Geoffrey King, "Two Byzantine Churches in North Jordan and Their Re-Use in the Islamic Period," *Damascener Mitteilungen* 1 (1983), 111–36, esp. 126–33.

Even more remarkable is the site of Rihab, 40 km southwest of Bostra and actually much closer to the city of Gerasa; however, its inscriptions, which name the archbishop, show that it lay in the territory of Bostra. The site, which is fairly large (800 × 400 m, with a small fort outside), contains an unusual number of small churches, all richly decorated with mosaic pavements.<sup>245</sup> As most of these are dated, a complete sequence can be followed. It reveals a surprising amount of activity at an unexpectedly late date. In some cases, the nature of the activity is not specified, but many inscriptions state that the church was built and the mosaic finished in the year named. The mosaics name the archbishop of Bostra and the donors, who are often churchmen, but mention no civic officials.

The inscriptions of these mosaics indicate considerable activity in the late sixth century, with churches (or at least their mosaics) dedicated in 582 (a restoration), 594 (new church), 595 (mosaic), and 605 (church). The work continues, as if without interruption, through the Persian period. The church of St. Stephen was built and its mosaic finished in 620, and three years later the mosaic in the small chapel of St. Peter was laid.<sup>246</sup>

Although these are only two sites out of hundreds, they suggest that the Persian occupation did not cause serious disruption, at least in some areas. Notable in this context is that the mosaic of St. Stephen (like that of 605) specifically mentions the consubstantial (*homoousios*) Trinity, that is, it decorated an Orthodox church. Likewise, the appearance of the archbishop of Bostra in the inscriptions at Rihab and Khirbet al-Samra (see below) shows that the metropolitan church was still operating. This is all the more surprising because the Persians were known to have favored the Monophysites, who often welcomed them. In this area, they seem to have allowed the Orthodox church to function normally.

Evidence for succeeding decades is similar. The brief period of Byzantine reoccupation (630–636) is also attested on two sites. At Salkhad, on the Jebel Druse east of Bostra, a church was built in 633, while Rihab was the scene of still more activity.<sup>247</sup> There the mosaic in the church of the prophet Isaiah was dedicated in 635, and the chapel of St. Menas was built in the same year. These inscriptions, which date to the very year of the Arab conquest, are the latest from this remarkable site.

A similar site stands 25 km southwest of Umm al-Jimal, in the southernmost part of the Hauran, at the edge of the desert. Khirbet al-Samra, like Rihab, was near the limits of the diocese of Bostra but was not at all remote, as it stood on the main highway between the metropolis, Amman, and Petra.<sup>248</sup> It may represent the ancient Hattita, named in the Peutinger Table. The town was small (only about 200 × 220 m) but densely occupied. A rectangular fort built by Diocletian on the same plan as that of Umm al-Jimal occupied the center, with a network of houses all around it. There was no real outer wall

<sup>245</sup> For Rihab, see M. Piccirillo, *Chiese e mosaici della Giordania settentrionale* (Jerusalem, 1981), 63–90. The mosaics and their inscriptions are now well illustrated in idem, *The Mosaics of Jordan* (Amman, 1993), 310–13.

<sup>246</sup> Piccirillo, *Chiese*, 73 f, 80 ff.

<sup>247</sup> Salkhad: P. Le Bas and W. H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines recueillies en Grèce et en Asie Mineure* (Paris, 1870), no. 1997; cf. the table in R. E. Brünnow and A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia* (Strassburg, 1909), III, 359 f; Rihab: Piccirillo, *Chiese*, 74–77.

<sup>248</sup> See the preliminary report of J.-P. Humbert and A. Desreumaux, “Khirbet es Samra,” in *Contribution française à l’archéologie jordanienne* (Amman, 1989), 113–21. The mosaics are illustrated and discussed in Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, 302–9. For the cemetery, see R. Savignac, “Excursion en Transjordanie et au Kh. Es-samra,” *RevBibl* 34 (1925), 110–35.

but a kind of barrier, which appears hastily built over the ruins of houses. The site contains at least eight churches, most of them decorated with mosaic floors. Although no details have been published, it appears that several of them were rebuilt after a period of decline or abandonment and that the most flourishing time for this town came in the early seventh century. Two mosaics are specifically dated to 637 and 639, while a third, like them, bears the name of Theodore, who was archbishop of Bostra around 620–640. This site, then, was flourishing at the time of the Arab conquest. Likewise, its large cemetery, which contains some eight hundred tombstones, somewhat more of them inscribed in Aramaic than in Greek, seems to have been most extensively used in the seventh century. The site was still occupied in the early eighth century, when some of the mosaics were defaced by iconoclasts, but appears to have been entirely abandoned by the early ninth century.

Although Rihab falls silent, the Arab conquest seems to have caused no disruption in church construction elsewhere in this countryside, if the example of Salkhad may be considered typical. There the church built in 633 received a new atrium in 665, the gift of the son of the original donors.<sup>249</sup>

Later evidence is scattered. In the Jebel Druse, the excavations at Si', a Roman temple complex abandoned in the fourth century, have revealed traces of Umayyad reoccupation, including a winepress built on the former paved courtyard. The settlement was abandoned at the end of the Umayyad period.<sup>250</sup> An inscription from Rimet Hazem near Suweida in the same district attests substantial building in the form of a reservoir dated to the reign of al-Hisham (727–742), but the associated site was apparently not excavated.<sup>251</sup>

Another excavation, of two rooms in two houses at Msayke in the southwest corner of the Leja, has produced some intriguing but fragmentary evidence.<sup>252</sup> Each house consists of a large number of tiny rooms or spaces built around or adjacent to courtyards. In the first house, the excavated room was apparently added in the Abbasid period and occupied continuously until the fifteenth century. In the other, the room was rebuilt in the late Byzantine or early Umayyad period. It was then abandoned and reoccupied at a much later date. In this case, it seems clear that the village continued through the period of transition well into the Middle Ages, though perhaps with some interruption.

Two other sites are more informative. Al-Kafr, northeast of Bostra, was a long-established site with gardens and vineyards and numerous buildings, now fragmentary; inscriptions show activity from the fourth century through the late sixth.<sup>253</sup> Its church of St. George, however, was dedicated in 652, and another inscription reveals that a house or a church was built from its foundations as late as 735. This is the latest Christian inscription from the region.

A church in Deir al-Adas, northwest of the Leja in the rich region of Jabiya, was

<sup>249</sup>Salkhad: above, note 247. Assignment to this period of two other inscriptions, at Mellah and Samma, has been proved erroneous; see P.-L. Gatier, "Les inscriptions grecques d'époque islamique (VIIe–VIIIe siècles) en Syrie du sud," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie* (as above, note 186), 145–57.

<sup>250</sup>J. Dentzer, "Six campagnes de fouilles à Si'," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 2 (1985), 82.

<sup>251</sup>See A. Rihawi, "Découverte de deux inscriptions arabes," *AArchSyr* 11–12 (1961–62), 207–11.

<sup>252</sup>See A. Guérin, "Premiers sondages archéologiques à Msayke, un village du Leja," *BEODam* 45 (1993), 33–46.

<sup>253</sup>Butler IIA.5, 325 f; cf. Gatier, "Les inscriptions," 147 f.

decorated with a mosaic that filled its nave. It bears a date of 722 and portrays activities that were characteristic and essential in local economic life: a grape harvest and a caravan of camels bearing jars, perhaps of olive oil (Fig. 38).<sup>254</sup> As the site is on the main road from Damascus to Tiberias in Palestine, the second scene is especially appropriate.

The district of Jabiya is an especially suitable place for such late activity, for it did not lose its importance with the collapse of the Ghassanids. Because it was a long-established site for an encampment of Arab nomads, the Arabs made use of it as soon as they arrived in the country.<sup>255</sup> According to the traditions of the conquest, Jabiya was the site of their first major camp in Syria and of a skirmish with the Byzantines before the fateful battle of the Yarmuk. In 638 the caliph Umar himself came here to hold a meeting of the main Arab commanders at which the terms and organization of the conquests were decided. As a result, the troops came here to collect their pay, and the place essentially functioned as the capital of the new *jund* or province of Syria.

The importance of Jabiya continued under the Umayyads, despite the establishment of Damascus as the regular capital by Muawiya (657–680). Although Muawiya himself tended to reside in Damascus, most of his successors maintained their nomadic traditions by moving constantly and often staying at Jabiya.<sup>256</sup> Consequently, it was here that the Syrian notables assembled to choose Marwan ibn al-Hakam as their caliph in 684 and later to recognize the sons of Abd al-Malik (685–705) as his successors. In the early eighth century, however, Jabiya lost its role as the main camp was shifted north of Aleppo to a location more convenient for the expeditions against the Byzantines that formed an essential part of Umayyad military life. Now that the southern region was pacified, and Arabia was no longer central to the new and expanding state, Jabiya was no longer suitable as a great center. Its region, however, still had the strategic location on caravan routes that the mosaic of Deir al-Adas reflects.

The Umayyad presence is also notable in the southern part of the district, which manifests a great deal of continuity and contains a distinctive building complex of that period. At that time, this district was of special importance because of its location between Arabia and Syria, and its largest town, Umm al-Jimal, prospered from the caravan trade between them.<sup>257</sup> Excavations at Umm al-Jimal reveal substantial occupation in the eighth century: Umayyad pottery is found in the open space, and the praetorium and one of the house complexes were rebuilt.<sup>258</sup> The praetorium may have undergone a period of abandonment in the second half of the seventh century, marked by plaster fallen from the walls, but in the first half of the eighth a new cobblestone floor was laid and the building reoccupied. It bore a decoration of plaster and may have presented a luxurious impression comparable to the more famous desert castles of the Umayyads. It remained in use until the end of the Umayyad period. Similarly, house XVIII, a large well-built courtyard house of the usual type and the only one excavated, was occupied in the Umayyad period, which is represented by two levels of cobblestone floors. Around the end of

<sup>254</sup> Illustrated and discussed in Donceel-Voûte, *Pavements* (as above, note 83), 45–54. The mosaic was formerly dated to 621: see Gatier, “Les inscriptions,” 248.

<sup>255</sup> For what follows, see “al-Djabiya” (as above, note 239).

<sup>256</sup> This aspect of the Umayyad caliphs is nicely sketched in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, I, 402–6.

<sup>257</sup> See King, “Umayyad Qusur,” 71–80, esp. 72–75.

<sup>258</sup> De Vries (1981), 63–65, 70 f, and idem (1993), 448, 452.



that age, the roof collapsed and the structure, like the rest of the site, was abandoned until modern times.<sup>259</sup>

The only specifically Umayyad complex of buildings in the whole region (outside Bostra) stands in its southernmost part, in the steppe 50 km south of Bostra, at the edge of the desert. It consists of a fort, Qasr al-Hallabat, with a mosque, and a bath, Hammam al-Sarakh, with adjacent waterworks and agricultural installations. The fort forms a square 38 m on a side, with rooms around a central court.<sup>260</sup> An inscription of 529 shows that it was restored by the *dux* Fl. Anastasius, whose work consisted of raising the walls and adding the corner towers. It is possible that the fort went out of use in the sixth century, to be occupied by monks. It was in any case reused by the Umayyads, who added an extensive decoration of carved stucco and painted plaster on the walls and geometric mosaics on the floors.<sup>261</sup> Relatively abundant pottery indicates continuity through the Umayyad period, with abandonment thereafter.

Immediately outside the walls stands the small mosque of 10 × 12 m, well built of limestone blocks laid without mortar.<sup>262</sup> It has a prayer room with a double colonnade and a projecting round *mihrab*, with a porch around three sides. A stepped platform near one corner was probably used for the call to prayer. Stylistic considerations date it to about 725–730. The bath stands a kilometer to the east and consists of a rectangular audience hall and three bathing rooms of which the largest (only 3.7 × 3.2 m) was domed.<sup>263</sup> Adjacent to it are a well, a water tank, and a structure where the animal that drove the mechanism for pumping water into the tank worked. The bath is built in the same style as the mosque and is contemporary with it.

These buildings were part of a larger system that supported them. Surveys have revealed a sophisticated system for capturing and storing water, with a large cistern whose walls contain Umayyad potsherds indicating rebuilding and maintenance in that period. Nearby are poorly preserved houses and a large area of walled terracing for agriculture. The public parts of the complex evidently depended on an infrastructure in which water was the most essential element but that also required workers and food production. In all cases, pottery shows occupation through the Umayyad period, perhaps continuing into the ninth century.<sup>264</sup>

This site constitutes a recreational outpost on the edge of the desert of a kind familiar from grander examples in Jordan and Palestine. Standing in isolation, it has no implication for urban settlement of the region but reflects instead a new development, the installation of a governing class with considerable mobility, content to establish bases away from the cities but easily accessible to the steppes and desert with which it had been

<sup>259</sup>There seems to be no evidence for occupation between the Umayyads and the 20th century; the earthquake of 749 may have provoked abandonment of the site, according to de Vries (1993), 449, 452.

<sup>260</sup>Plan and discussion in Butler IIA.2, 70–77; for the chronology and outlying buildings, see the detailed survey of D. L. Kennedy, *Archaeological Explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan* (Oxford, 1982), 17–68.

<sup>261</sup>See G. Bisheh, “Excavations at Qasr al Hallabat, 1979,” *AAJord* 24 (1980), 69–77. For the mosaics, see Piccirillo, *Mosaics*, 350 f.

<sup>262</sup>See Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 502–5, and Bisheh, “Excavations.”

<sup>263</sup>Butler IIA.2, 77–80; Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture*, 498–502; cf. G. Bisheh, “Hammam al Sarah in the Light of Recent Excavations,” *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 4 (1989), 225–30.

<sup>264</sup>See below, note 268.

most familiar. The buildings most likely represent the dwelling of an Umayyad prince or notable, established near the desert from which the regime drew its manpower and support.<sup>265</sup>

This southernmost region of the Hauran, now included in the Kingdom of Jordan, provides some of the best evidence for settlement pattern in the periods of interest because of surveys that paid much attention to pottery.<sup>266</sup> They covered the region from Samma in the west to the foothills of the Jebel Druse. The results are remarkably consistent, with a few variations within sites and between them. In general, the pottery, like the remains, attests an intensive occupation of the area in late antiquity; every site surveyed was occupied. More comprehensively than the remains, it shows an almost equally intensive occupation during the Umayyad period; only a few sites or parts of sites went out of use. The evidence of the pottery is too abundant to be explained by nomads or other transients; it is plain that the sites continued to be occupied. As the remains contain virtually nothing that is specifically Muslim (except for the complex described above, which is not part of the village economy), it appears that the population remained Christian.<sup>267</sup> The general lack of building activity so characteristic of earlier years, however, suggests that they were poorer than previously. All this comes to an end in the ninth century, if not earlier; after that, there is a long gap on all sites, lasting for four hundred years or more.<sup>268</sup>

Bostra flourished in the sixth century and under the Umayyads, to succumb to the earthquake of 749. Its territory offers important supplementary information that puts the city into a context and provides striking evidence for the seventh century, which at Bostra is extremely obscure. In the sixth century, the whole region was flourishing, with innumerable villages and several larger settlements that prospered from a carefully maintained agriculture. Notable among them is Umm al-Jimal in the south. The region was largely demilitarized, protected not by the Roman legions in their camps but by the new auxiliaries, the Arab Ghassanids, who had their base in this very district. Their presence probably accounts for much of the observed prosperity, notably in Batanea, the fertile district near their main camp of Jabiya.

<sup>265</sup> See the remarks of Creswell, above, note 262.

<sup>266</sup> See G. King et al., "Survey of Byzantine and Islamic Sites in Jordan, Second Season Report," *AAJord* 27 (1983), 385–436, esp. 405–15 and 420–31, and eidem, "Some Churches of the Byzantine Period in the Jordanian Hawran," *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 3 (1988), 35–75. A survey of the adjacent southern region around Umm al-Quttein has produced similar results, with clear evidence of growth through the 6th century, continuity through the Umayyad period, and abandonment in the 9th/10th century: see D. Kennedy and P. Freeman, "Southern Hauran Survey, 1992," *Levant* 27 (1995), 39–73, esp. 60.

<sup>267</sup> King, "Two Byzantine Churches," 111–36, reports the conversion of two churches into mosques by the destruction of their apses and the addition of tower minarets. He suggests that they may be Umayyad or perhaps more likely Mamluk, the time when the area was again reoccupied, though on a smaller scale. In fact, since the tower minaret was introduced only in the 9th century, the Mamluk date may be considered certain; see Bloom, *Minaret* (as above, note 196), 55.

<sup>268</sup> The date of abandonment of these sites, like that of Umm al-Jimal and its neighbors, depends on the analysis of ceramic finds. Traditionally, the pottery found here was identified as Umayyad and considered to end in the mid-8th century. More recent analyses, which are only beginning to find their way into the general literature, however, show that this pottery continued into the Abbasid period and that the notion of a sudden abandonment in the mid-8th century can no longer be sustained. See, for example, MacAdam, "Settlements" (as above, note 209), 56 n. 35, and J.-P. Sodini et al., "De la céramique byzantine à la céramique omeyyade," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie* (as above, note 186), 195–218.

The archaeology of this region (not the written sources, which are virtually nonexistent) makes a special contribution in showing continuity through the seventh century. Most notable are the churches of Rihab, which show continuous construction, always at the same standard, uninterrupted by the Persian invasion or the Byzantine reoccupation, until the arrival of Islam. Likewise, Khirbet al-Samra appears to have reached its peak in the early seventh century and to have flourished into the ninth. Umm al-Jimal, on the other hand, may have suffered some contraction in the seventh century but was certainly flourishing in the eighth.

As in Bostra, the Umayyads have left their mark on this entire region. Their major constructions appear to have been in the south, at Umm al-Jimal, Qasr al-Hallabat, and Hammam al-Sarakh, but inscriptions and mosaics show activity until the end of the period. The villages south of Bostra are especially informative, with clear evidence of uninterrupted occupation through the Umayyads and probably into the ninth century.

The region reveals another extremely important aspect of the post-Byzantine period, coexistence of Christians and Muslims, as already evident at Bostra. The countryside evidently remained Christian; the villages of the south have no mosques, nor even does Umm al-Jimal. The Muslim presence affected the city and the region adjacent to the desert and certainly also Jabiya, which has left no remains. Otherwise, the district continued to support a large Christian population, ruled by Muslims who appear to have been concentrated in specific districts.

This does not mean that Christians and Arabs were somehow distinct in these periods. In fact, the local population was largely Arab in origin, and the tribal Arab element had been powerfully reinforced by the arrival and settlement of the Ghassanids, whose role was of great significance. They not only entered the empire peacefully and established themselves in it, but provided a model for the coexistence of nomads and settled people and a model for nomads themselves to settle—lessons that could certainly have provided an exemplar for their successors of the desert who arrived in the seventh century and by Umayyad times had settled in many places, yet maintained their moving camp, often at Jabiya, the very center of the Ghassanids.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The material studied here reflects the abundance and variety of the archaeological record of two widely separated regions of Syria in the crucial period from Justinian to the end of the Umayyads. It provides information about city and country alike in the two centuries of transition. It should therefore support substantial answers to the two central questions with which this study began: What did the Arabs find when they conquered Syria, and how did they transform it during the first century of their rule? These questions might best be approached by viewing the material in a chronological framework in order to follow the broad developments and determine the importance of regional differences.

Syria flourished under Justinian, with city and country sharing in a general prosperity. Even when disaster struck, major efforts were made to restore destroyed cities and looted wealth. Antioch, of course, suffered tremendously from the earthquakes of 526 and 528, but most of all from the Persian sack of 540. Yet even after that, the government

had the resources and will to undertake a large-scale restoration of public and private buildings, which has been amply confirmed by excavations. Nevertheless, much of the city remained in ruins, and full recovery was precluded by the succeeding disasters.

Antioch, though, appears as an anomaly when seen in the larger context. Its neighbor, Apamea, certainly flourished, with extensive construction and decoration of churches and palatial houses, all in the most lavish late antique style. The Cathedral was built around 529, the Atrium Church completely rebuilt in the same period, and several of the houses—notably the Triclinos House, which had been partially destroyed by a fire in 539—manifest extensive reconstruction or embellishment. These were true urban mansions, where an ancient way of life continued virtually unchanged in the great reception halls, elegant courtyards, and abundant dwelling rooms.

Likewise, the countryside that formed the territories of these two cities continued to prosper. The region best studied, the hill country, apparently reached the height of its activity somewhat earlier, around 480, but construction continued until the middle of the sixth century, by which time the population had increased tremendously in every district. The lone excavation of Dehes confirms the sixth century as the time when the village reached its peak.

Bostra also was the scene of great activity in the first years of Justinian, with inscriptions that attest construction of public works until about 540, and archaeology indicating extensive construction in the area around the cathedral and the church of Sts. Sergius, Bacchus, and Leontius. Its territory also seems to have reached a height of development in the sixth century, as is evident throughout, but especially at the largest site, Umm al-Jimal, where the barracks and praetorium can be assigned to this time.

In most cases, there is evidence for continuing prosperity through the end of the sixth century, though with significant regional differences. Epiphania provides the most striking examples: its cathedral was built (or rebuilt) in 595, and its countryside seems to have flourished more than ever before. The district closest to the city provides abundant evidence for the last three decades of the century, while construction (especially of forts) in the northern district was very active from 556 to 577. At Bostra, the epigraphical record is silent after 540, and the archaeology provides nothing specifically datable to the late sixth century, but the countryside evidently flourished under the administration of the Ghassanids until their rupture with Constantinople in 582.

Apamea suffered the fate of Antioch in 573, when it was sacked and destroyed by the Persians. The remains clearly confirm widespread devastation, but even here there was a major effort at recovery. The Atrium Church was rebuilt, and rubble was brought in from other parts of the city, where major efforts of cleaning and reorganization had apparently been made. Several of the houses were destroyed, but the Console House went on functioning normally until the end of the century.

Antioch offers little specific evidence, though the sources narrate a dismal sequence of continuing disasters from which the city could hardly have recovered. The picture of the hill country is more complex. Residential construction ceased around 550, but churches were still repaired or expanded past the end of the century. Yet wealth was still available to be stored, as the Kaper Koraon treasure shows: it was accumulated after 540, in part at least to replace goods looted then. It appears that the population had reached the maximum level that the country could support and that the region had entered a

period of stagnation but not total impoverishment. The excavation of Dehes suggests that this was not a time of population decline but that the same level of occupation was maintained through the century.

As the datable building activity in the reign of Justinian seems confined to its first fifteen years, it is natural to suppose that the devastating bubonic plague that struck the empire in 542 was a proximate cause of change and demographic decline. This idea is fundamental to some current interpretations of the Near East in the period of transition.<sup>269</sup> It seems to have a certain plausibility: Antioch was plainly in decline, most construction in the hills stopped by mid-century (an approximate date that could easily reflect the plague), and even at Bostra, far in the south, there is no evidence for public works after 540. The plague certainly did strike and affected this area (Antioch is specifically attested, and Evagrius, a local man, is a witness to its recurrence later in the century). It would necessarily have had a powerful negative demographic effect, especially in the cities. Yet the evidence from the region as a whole is ambiguous at best and fails to support any generalized notion of population decline or fundamental change.

There are clearly areas, both urban and rural, that continued to flourish after the plague. Apamea was still a major city, with its churches and houses apparently in full use as late as 573; it could still be described as the home of the Syrian aristocracy in 570. The territories of Apamea and Antioch may have stagnated, but there is no evidence that their population declined; quite the contrary, the excavations of Dehes show unchanged occupation through the end of the century, and the treasure of Kaper Koraon indicates that wealth was still being stored, even in small places, for a century after 540. Most striking is the evidence from Epiphania, where the large houses of the central hill continued to function without change into the Umayyad period, and the cathedral could be built or restored at the end of the century. Even more impressive is the record of activity in its territory, which surprisingly shows increased construction after the reign of Justinian. Finally (though here there is less specifically dated evidence), the territory of Bostra, stretching far to the south, exhibits no change or decline at all in the decades after the plague. Umm al-Jimal could even build its largest church in 557, and the survey of the southern district revealed no pattern of abandonment until centuries later.

None of this means that the plague had no effect but does suggest that it was not such a widespread disaster as it has been portrayed, and especially that it was not the agent of fundamental change. It would appear that its ravages were repaired rather quickly. The archaeology, of course, does not allow events to be followed year by year and has many serious gaps, but when the mass of evidence is considered, it shows that much of this country was still prospering in the late sixth century. The plague need not even be the sole explanation for the regions that do seem to manifest serious transformation.

Antioch suffered enough disasters, even without the plague, to destroy a normal city. The plague no doubt compounded its problems and accelerated its decline. Reduction

<sup>269</sup>It is the main conclusion of Kennedy, "The Last Century" (as above, note 1), 183: "The transition from antique to medieval Syria occurred in the years after 540 not after 640." See also L. Conrad, "The Plague in Bilad al-Sham in Pre-Islamic Times," in *Proceedings of the Symposium on Bilad al-Sham during the Byzantine Period*, II, ed. M. Bakhit and M. Asfour (Amman, 1986), 143–63. He maintains, after a careful and detailed treatment of the evidence, that the various plagues of the 6th century would have had a serious negative effect on the demography of Syria.

of the city, demographically and economically, would naturally have had a serious effect on its territory. The major market for village products would have been severely reduced, a factor perhaps significant in the stagnation of construction in the hills. Yet it is not the only explanation. By this time, it appears that this country was reaching saturation point, that it simply could not accommodate many more people, and that it had as much good stone housing as it needed. The "Malthusian crisis" of Georges Tate may be adequate to account for the stagnation. Similarly, in Bostra, the outburst of public works in the early years of Justinian may have been adequate to supply the needs of future generations.

Activity in the north came to a sudden end at the beginning of the seventh century. The last inscriptions from the hill country are of 610 and from the region of Epiphania, 605. Nothing is known of Antioch or its territory for the next decades. These years, of course, coincide with the great war between the Romans and Persians, which began in 602 and brought the Persians to Antioch in 610 and to Damascus in 613. All Syria was under Persian occupation until their last troops recrossed the Euphrates in 630.

The Persian period in Syria is poorly known. Most sources deal with the war itself, whose theater was in Asia Minor, around Constantinople, and in Armenia and Mesopotamia. In those regions, fighting was constant and bitter, destruction savage and widespread, as the Persians attempted to strike a fatal blow at their adversaries.<sup>270</sup> Yet in Syria, their administration appears to have been peaceful, since they planned on permanent occupation of it and Egypt. The little surviving information indicates that they set up a regular administration and intervened, as their Roman predecessors had done, in the ecclesiastical conflicts of the day.<sup>271</sup> The archaeological record of the region south of Syria, in modern Jordan, suggests that notions of widespread destruction by the Persians are extremely exaggerated and that life went on much as it had before.<sup>272</sup>

The material evidence for the period of Persian occupation is extremely limited, as the archaeology rarely allows developments to be assigned to precise decades. Only where dated inscriptions or sufficient coins in a clearly identified context are available may exact dates be assigned. Except for the southern part of the region, no clear picture emerges, yet some general trends may be discerned.

The north, as noted, suddenly ceases to provide evidence for construction. It would appear that resources were no longer available in this region, most exposed to the actual fighting in the first years of the war, and perhaps most vulnerable to governmental exactions. The Persians, in any case, seem to have done nothing to improve or change the situation. They, too, may have needed the resources or manpower of the region for their war effort in neighboring Anatolia and, later, Mesopotamia.

Apamea has produced a rare piece of evidence in the form of a Sasanian silver coin found in the Console House, which appears to have been occupied normally until at least 610. Its fate during the next twenty years is unclear. There is also no evidence from Epiphania, but here, too, the inscriptions of the countryside come to an abrupt end in 605, never to resume.

The Persian war and occupation would certainly have had one major effect, which

<sup>270</sup>See C. Foss, "The Persians in Asia Minor and the End of Antiquity," *EHR* 90 (1975), 721–47.

<sup>271</sup>See the useful survey of M. Morony, "Syria under the Persians, 610–629," in *Proceedings of the Second Symposium on the History of Bilad al-Sham during the Early Islamic Period*, I (Amman, 1987), 87–95.

<sup>272</sup>The evidence is reviewed by R. Schick, "Jordan on the Eve of the Muslim Conquest, A.D. 602–634," in Canivet and Rey-Coquais, *La Syrie* (as above, note 186), 107–20.

would eventually leave its traces in the entire material record—the flight of the aristocracy. Whereas peasants had little to gain and much to lose by leaving their ancestral lands, the rich were in a position to make their way safely to Roman territory before the enemy approached and might well have feared the approach of a new force likely to covet their money and property.<sup>273</sup> When they were gone, their houses presumably lay open to confiscation or new occupation. In any case, the patronage that maintained the traditions of Greco-Roman urban life, with all its amenities in the form of public works and services, would have collapsed. The urban structure, with its monumental public buildings, depended on a network of wealth and influence based on the great landowners and their allies, the imperial officials. The officials departed with the Roman government (or, if they stayed, most probably lost their influence); the aristocracy is unlikely to have lingered long after them. Patronage of secular public works probably collapsed with the arrival of a Persian administration.

The Persians, though, did not arrive in huge numbers; they still had a major war to fight and seem to have been more inclined to deport populations for service elsewhere than to bring in their own.<sup>274</sup> Basically, the population remained what it had been before: an urban Greek-speaking population embedded in a countryside whose native language was Aramaic or Arabic, all of it Christian and mostly of the Monophysite persuasion. Already by the sixth century, the Church had assumed a major role in local administration. The few sources that discuss this area suggest that the Persians dealt with the religious authorities, leaving them considerable power, though favoring the anti-imperial Monophysites. Religious patronage, therefore, need not have been affected, except insofar as the Persians might have extracted higher taxes to pay for the war effort and the costs of occupation.

Continuing ecclesiastical activity is manifest in the south, where life seems to have continued without any visible break. Although the record of Bostra itself is silent, its territory has produced rare dated evidence. Churches were built or repaired at Samma (624) and at Rihab (620 and 623), in areas where activity had been continuous for the previous several decades. Nearby Khirbet al-Samra seems to have reached its height in the early seventh century. Here, at least, it is clear that the Persian occupation had no deleterious effects. There may have been another factor in the continuing prosperity and importance of the southern region. Islamic sources have much to say of the trade between the Arabian peninsula and Syria, with Mecca and Bostra specifically figuring. It would appear that such trade continued without interruption during this period (which was the time of the rise to power of the Prophet in Medina). If so—and the evidence is open to serious criticism—such trade might have been a factor in the continuing prosperity of the south contrasted with the apparent lack of activity in the north.

In sum, the Persian period may have been of great importance by provoking the departure of a class of people who had maintained the urban fabric for many centuries, thus interrupting the continuity of an urban life already badly shaken in the north by the disasters of the previous century. The effects on the cities may not have been immedi-

<sup>273</sup>This point is well made by F. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton, 1981), 48 f, and by J. Balty in *Apamée M13*, 498–501.

<sup>274</sup>In some areas, though, later sources do indicate that Persians were settled, only to be moved around by Arab caliphs; see Baladhuri 117, 148.



ate, but in the long run their traditional existence was fatally undermined. Yet the countryside, except in areas close to the war zone, continued normally, possibly aided by trade with the Arabian peninsula.

The Persians were eventually defeated, and the forces of Emperor Heraclius returned in triumph in 630. The restoration of imperial rule was incredibly brief. After the battle of the Yarmuk in 636 and the fall of Antioch in the following year, Syria became an Islamic country, the seat of a governor and soon of a great empire. These short years are naturally almost impossible to perceive in the archaeology. Yet their traces appear precisely where evidence of the Persian period is most abundant, in the territory of Bostra. A church was built in Salkhad in 633 and two at Rihab in 635. Once again, it seems that life continued normally in this region. The effect of the reconquest, which may have brought some administrative change and return of the aristocracy, cannot be identified at the other sites.

It is now possible to approach the first of the questions with which this study began: What did the Arabs find when their conquering armies arrived in Syria? The answer will vary with the region. In the south they found a flourishing district with many villages, some of which still had the resources to decorate their churches or construct new ones. There are no evident signs of major change in this district, which seems to have continued much as it had been under Justinian. The local capital, Bostra, also appears to have been in good condition, with its baths and large churches functioning normally. The available evidence, however, does not reveal a detailed picture of the city.

There was one aspect of this southern district especially relevant to its new masters. The whole region, and much more, was already accustomed to the settlement and domination of Arab tribes, in the form of the Ghassanids, who had protected it under the suzerainty of the emperor. They did not actually rule, for imperial officials still controlled the local administration. Yet they provided a model for the future rulers. The local population was accustomed to once nomadic Arabs, who had settled and assimilated, living in villas like the locals but still maintaining their mobile army and using as their headquarters a vast camp at Jabiya. It is surely not an accident that the Muslims chose the very same spot for their main military base in the region and perhaps not a coincidence that in Syria, unlike Mesopotamia or Egypt, they settled in the towns with the local population, as the Ghassanids had done, rather than building separate garrison cities.

The region of the Orontes had a varied appearance. Epiphania was apparently still prosperous, with a relatively new cathedral and luxurious occupied houses. The country to the east and north was densely populated but had produced no new construction since the beginning of the century. In that, it resembled the hill country to the north, the territories of Apamea and Antioch. The innumerable villages of this region were apparently still occupied and supported as large a population as they could, but in a less flourishing state than before. They seem no longer to have had the resources to erect new houses or churches but were still capable of accumulating treasure. The Arabs would have found a large and not altogether impoverished rural population in the entire countryside east of the Orontes.

The great cities of the north, though, had a less flourishing appearance. Apamea had barely risen from its ruins, and its vast mansions may already have betrayed the absence of their aristocratic owners. Antioch, likewise, was a wreck. The long series of disasters

had left the city mostly ruined and many parts of it abandoned. Life went on, but at a much reduced scale. Here alone, the Arabs would have found a civilization already transformed, with the great public works of antiquity abandoned or ruined and the reduced population living in conditions far inferior to those of their predecessors of a century earlier.

In other words, much of the area studied here, especially the countryside, was still intact and apparently enjoyed the same social and economic conditions as it had through late antiquity. It had a large population, who used money and stored treasure, however much their trading patterns may have been altered by the Persian occupation or the connections with Arabia. The church still functioned and in the south had the resources for construction. At least two of the cities, Bostra and Epiphania, seem not to have suffered any major change. Only the greatest of the cities, Antioch and Apamea, had lost their ancient glory, the result of events that had long preceded the Arab conquest.

The great events that marked the permanent transfer of this whole region from the Roman Empire to an Islamic state have left no trace in the archaeological record. Syria seems to have capitulated peacefully, for the sites show no trace of destruction that can be associated with the arrival of the Arabs. In fact, the southern district once again seems to have continued its normal life, to judge by the new mosaics laid in the churches of Khirbet al-Samra in 637 and 639, that is, in the years immediately after the conquest. Elsewhere the picture is more varied, with some real transformation taking place in the city and countryside alike during the century when the new conquerors ruled their vast empire from this very country. The remains reveal many changes in the seventh and eighth centuries, with some districts rising and prospering while others fall further and further into decay.

At Antioch, a general development is clear though impossible to follow chronologically. During the Umayyad period, when it served as an important military base, the city lost whatever remained of its ancient urban appearance. Only a few great churches remained standing, and still in use, as signs of a departed splendor. Otherwise, public buildings and large houses were divided for a small-scale occupation especially evident in the streets, former broad boulevards now often blocked by intrusive building. Most of the great villas, like those in the comfortable suburb of Daphne, had long since been abandoned. The Umayyad city, it would seem, had the appearance of a town or village.

The hill country around Antioch and Apamea continued to support a large population but in conditions of increasing squalor. The excavations of Dehes reveal a place whose population had not declined, who still grew their products and traded them—finds of coins show continuing economic activity—but whose houses were falling down around them. When parts of the houses collapsed, they were simply propped up, rubbish was leveled to make new floors, and more activity took place in the courtyards. One house may have been abandoned around the time of the conquest, but it was soon reoccupied. The general impression is of a large population living in deteriorating conditions through the entire period. The impression might have to be qualified by the Kaper Koron treasure, whose latest objects are of the time of the Arab conquest. Whether this silver was buried because of the arrival of the Arabs or much later, it shows that some village churches still had considerable resources. The population of this district was and

remained Christian; there is no trace of Muslim settlement or conversion to Islam in the entire region.

The most striking and detailed evidence comes from Apamea, where the city underwent what the excavators aptly call a process of deurbanization. Fundamental change from an urban to a quasi-rural environment is evident in every part of the site. The colonnades of the grand boulevards were blocked, and structures, probably shops, extended out into the streets in a process that seems to have begun in the middle of the seventh century. The major churches still stood but were surrounded by graveyards that intruded into the outlying buildings of the ecclesiastical complexes.

The fate of the houses was most drastic. Their large rooms and courts were divided and put to new use in a series of operations that involved fairly careful work. It seems clear that they were transformed from the residences of individual aristocratic families to those of numerous peasants or artisans who often established small-scale production in the houses. The process of transformation seems to have been especially active in the mid-seventh century: in the Console House, for example, the wall decoration collapsed after 630, and the well was built into the great reception room around 660. Other houses offer similar, if often less precise evidence. It appears that the first stage of transformation followed the Arab conquest, under circumstances that can be better imagined than described.

The remains clearly indicate a major change of population, a process that probably began at the time of the Persian invasions, may have been temporarily arrested by the Byzantine reconquest, but no doubt accelerated under the Arabs. Those who left were evidently the aristocracy, abandoning their houses that filled much of the center of the city. They were replaced by people who lived on a smaller scale, presumably representing an influx from the countryside. The population of the city thus increased rather than diminished as more people lived in each house. The reasons for such an influx may have to do with the degradation of the local environment that the excavations have suggested, as well as an increasing pressure of population in the villages. Umayyad Apamea, then, no longer had the appearance of a city but still supported a large population, though at a much lower standard of living than in previous centuries. This population was overwhelmingly Christian. It still used existing churches around which it was buried. There is only one trace of the new religion, in the small mosque built in the main colonnade. Its size and location show that it was not intended to serve a large congregation but may have been built largely for travelers passing along the route that followed this street.

Muslims are also absent from the territory of Apamea, whose development seems to have been similar to that of Antioch, as far as can be judged without excavation. Yet it offers one anomaly in the form of the treasure of Site 13. This large hoard of gold coins was buried around 680 and represents the coinage in circulation at that time. Although there is no way to determine the circumstances of its deposit or the identity of its owner, the mere existence of such a treasure indicates that the region was not altogether impoverished but that considerable money was still circulating in the immediate surroundings of Apamea.

Epiphania (Hama) forms a refreshing contrast to this general image of desolation. The city seems not to have suffered at all: its large houses were still occupied in the eighth

century as they had been in the sixth, and the Umayyads brought major construction of a kind not yet encountered. The cathedral was transformed into (or replaced by) a large mosque, which stood in the center of the city. This indicates a major Muslim presence, in contrast to the regions to the north. Similarly, the countryside has traces of Muslim settlement in the form of small mosques. Although these cannot be dated, it appears that Ma'aret al-Nu'man became an important Muslim settlement also in this period.

The southern district, as before, follows a different development, first evident at Bosra, which continued to play a role in regional administration. Here the Umayyads showed the dominance of Islam by building a large mosque in the center of the city. The smaller mosque of al-Mabrak by the walls probably was also their work. Likewise, the large farmhouse at the edge of the city was also a product of this period. The establishment of Islam did not entail the disappearance of Christianity, for the cathedral and the other large church were still in use. The fate of the public buildings is less clear; one of the baths may have continued to function, the other was ruined and abandoned. The square by the Nabatean arch was occupied by intrusive buildings, suggesting a pattern of occupation similar to that of the other cities. The major break here came not with the Arabs but with the great earthquake of 749, which devastated the city and left little standing. Until then, Bosra appears to have been a flourishing place, like Hama, one that retained its earlier prosperity but assumed a new, Islamic appearance.

The territory of Bosra continued its peaceful and prosperous existence, with a few major additions. Churches were still being built or repaired and other works constructed as late as 735. Existing churches still functioned at Khirbet al-Samra, where the mosaics were defaced in the iconoclasm of the 720s. Umm al-Jimal likewise saw substantial reconstruction in the early eighth century, perhaps after a period of deterioration. All these sites were Christian, as was the vast majority of the population throughout this southern district. But as in Bosra, Islam makes its appearance here. The camp at Jabiya was maintained as a major military base until the early eighth century, though it has left no material trace. More substantial is the complex of fort (Qasr al-Hallabat), mosque, and bath (Hammam al-Sarakh) at the very southern limit of this district. These structures formed part of an organized settlement with a sophisticated system of irrigation that represents a new phenomenon of an aristocratic dwelling on the bounds of the desert of a kind familiar in greater examples in Jordan.

What, then, did the Arabs do with the regions they conquered? For the most part, they seem to have left them alone. The great cities of the north and their territories continued to deteriorate, with little added to their fabric. Only the small mosque at Apamea attests a Muslim presence, though the military establishment at Antioch would also have been represented in constructions that have not been discovered. Only at Hama did the Umayyads bring major change in the form of a large central mosque and perhaps with scattered settlements in its countryside. The image of Bosra is similar to that of Hama: a substantial Muslim presence in the city, with an occasional new center in the territory that remained overwhelmingly Christian.

All this suggests that the Muslims did not arrive in overwhelming numbers and that they settled primarily in the cities from which they could rule the rest. They appear to have left the Christian population to its own devices, only administering it and collecting taxes. They rarely settled in the countryside, though they did establish one new site on

the edge of the desert. Nor did they create an "Islamic city." Where evidence of their settlement is available, it appears that they simply inserted their new buildings into an existing fabric, but were careful to place them in dominating central positions. This is especially evident at Hama, where the mosque replaced the existing cathedral, but at Bostra mosques shared the urban space with equally grand churches. This implies a degree of peaceful coexistence throughout the Umayyad period, with Muslims and Christians living side by side in some of the cities, themselves embedded in an almost entirely Christian countryside. The Muslims were clearly a small minority of the population concentrated in a few places rather than scattered through the region.<sup>275</sup>

Where Muslims settled, they brought major changes to the existing cities in the form of mosques, but otherwise the life of the late Roman city and country continued as it had been. Places that were prospering in the late sixth century, like Epiphania and the region of Bostra, continued to flourish under the new rulers. Cities that were already in decay went on deteriorating. The countryside in the north, stagnating since the sixth century or the Persian occupation, also sank to a lower level. None of this, however, constitutes a sharp break with the past; the transition was gradual throughout the region. The drastic breaks had occurred earlier—on several occasions at Antioch, in 573 at Apamea—and were to come again at the end of this period.

The end of the Umayyads generally marked the end of prosperity in this region. The most drastic discontinuity in urban life was brought by the great earthquake of 749. This afflicted a wide area, including Bostra, which was "swallowed up" and never recovered. Whether it so affected Umm al-Jimal is less clear, but occupation seems to cease around this time. The whole southern district, which had flourished continuously, now seems to undergo major change; there is no evidence of construction in churches or villages after 735. Although no clear break can be identified elsewhere, it is clear that conditions in the ninth and tenth centuries were far less favorable than they had been under the Umayyads.

At Bostra, occupation seems to end in the ninth century. Its territory, also, became deserted: the Muslim settlement south of Umm al-Jimal produced no evidence later than the ninth century, nor did the whole southern district. Apamea was inhabited until the early tenth, but the final period was one of increasing squalor, with poor disorganized use of the surviving buildings. The churches appear to have been abandoned and the houses occupied by peasants who built tiny stalls for their animals. By 891 the place could be described as a ruin. The hill country, to judge by the example of Dehes, also deteriorated, to be abandoned altogether by the ninth or tenth century.

Two cities stand out from this general image of desolation. Hama prospered under the Abbasids, who restored the mosque and built a new fort. It could be described as flourishing in 884. Antioch, likewise, profited from its strategic location near the frontier to retain some importance for centuries after. In general, though, the evidence clearly identifies the age of the Umayyads as the last period of prosperity this country was to know for four hundred years. The eighth century marked the end, and for some places the culmination, of a flourishing age that had begun with Alexander the Great, if not earlier. Thereafter, universal desolation afflicted these regions until the time of the Ayyu-

<sup>275</sup>See Donner, *Early Conquests*, 245–50, on the migration and settlement of Muslim Arabs in Syria.

bids in the twelfth century. The causes of that fundamental change certainly include civil war, the increasing settlement of nomads, and the transfer of the capital from Damascus to Baghdad; considering them would go far beyond the aims of this study.

In sum, the archaeology allows regional developments to be clearly perceived. The areas studied here prospered in the sixth century, were to some extent disturbed by the Persian occupation, and were transformed in varying degrees under the Umayyads. Their real decline came in the ninth century or later. These conclusions are far from answering the major questions about the nature of the Islamic conquest and transformation of Syria, but can provide a stepping-stone toward a more profound consideration of the problems. If the material studied here were combined with that from other parts of Syria, and especially with the abundant archaeological record of Jordan, real progress might be made toward understanding one of the great events of western history, as well as the natures of the late Roman and Umayyad empires. Much remains to be done, but when it is done, it will necessarily take careful account of the archaeological documentation and integrate it into the general history of the age.

University of Massachusetts, Boston

### Abbreviations

*Antioch*: *Antioch on the Orontes*, all published in Princeton:

- I: *The Excavations of 1932*, ed. G. W. Elderkin (1934)
- II: *The Excavations, 1933–1936*, ed. R. Stillwell (1938)
- III: *The Excavations, 1937–1939*, ed. R. Stillwell (1941)
- IV.1: *Ceramics and Islamic Coins*, ed. F. O. Waage (1948)
- V: *Les portiques d'Antioche*, ed. J. Lassus (1977)

*Apamée*: *Fouilles d'Apamée*, all published in Brussels:

- Apamée* I.1: J. Napoleone-Lemaire and J. Balty, *L'église à atrium de la grande colonnade* (1969)
- Apamée* M13: *Apamée de Syrie. Bilan des recherches archéologiques, 1973–1979: Aspects de l'architecture domestique d'Apamée* (*Fouilles d'Apamée, Misc.*, fasc. 13), ed. J. Balty (1984)
- Apamée* 1969: *Apamée de Syrie. Bilan des recherches archéologiques, 1965–1968* (= *Fouilles d'Apamée, Misc.*, fasc. 6), ed. J. Balty (1969)
- Apamée* 1972: *Apamée de Syrie. Bilan des recherches archéologiques, 1969–1971* (= *Fouilles d'Apamée, Misc.*, fasc. 7), ed. J. and J. Balty (1972)

Butler: H. C. Butler, *Syria: Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expeditions to Syria* (Leiden, 1907–49)

## APPENDIX: DATED INSCRIPTIONS FROM AL-A'LA

The texts are all published by W. K. Prentice in *Greek and Latin Inscriptions from Syria* (= Butler IIIB.1, 1–42). The names are those of village sites.

C = church   H = house   L = lintel   T = tower

344	Mishrifeh: L?	565	Sheikh Ali Kasun: L
362	Halban: fragment	570	Tell id-Deheb: L
373	Ir-Ruheibeh: H	573	It-Tuba: H
454	Mishrifeh: stone	575	Nawa: L
468/77	Nawa: C?	575	Abu'l Kudur: L?
470	Tell id-Deheb: L	577	Umm et-Tuweineh: C
484	Nawa: fragment	579	Sabba: C?
489	Tell id-Deheb: L	580	Idnin: L
506	Sheikh Ali Kasun: T	582	It-Tuba: L
530	Ir-Ruheibeh: L	584	Mishrifeh: L
534	Halban: fragment	586?	Zabbudeh: L?
541	Halban: T	590	Zabbudeh: L
542	Il 'Anz: L	592	Zabbudeh: L
544	Sabba: L	593	Tell id-Deheb: architrave
547	Sabba: L	597?	Mishrifeh: church plaque
557	Ir-Ruheibeh: fragment	598	Sheikh Ali Kasun: L
559	Nawa: L	598	It-Tayibeh: fragment
560	Temek: L	598	Deir Nawa: monastery
561	Kunbus: T	599	Nawa: C
564	Ir-Ruheibeh: L	605	Sheikh Ali Kasun: L